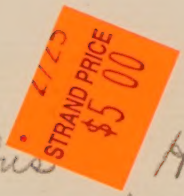
JABEZ
EASTERBROOK
JOSEPH HOCKING

Harry L. Baynes

Jan. 19, 1906



This Hocking's [illegible] Dangerous doctrine is taught Possibly 9 out of 10 would not recognize it but heresy is taught.

JABEZ EASTERBROOK

"The horse dashed madly on."

Jabez Easterbrook]

[*Page 120*

JABEZ EASTERBROOK.

A Religious Novel.

BY

JOSEPH HOCKING.

"Found himself on his back on the hard road.
(*Page* 91.)

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TO

MY SEVEREST CRITIC,

MY WIFE.

JABEZ EASTERBROOK.

CHAPTER I.

'T' NEW PASSON."

It was the month of August. The air was hot and sultry, and would have been almost unbearable but for the gentle breezes which now and then were wafted from the rugged hills in the near distance, to the village which nestled in the valley. It was a quaint old village, and to a certain extent possessed of artistic beauty, although it was clearly to be seen that in the building of a vast majority of the houses, no architect had been consulted; for while they were substantial, and had an air of home-likeness resting upon them, they were built higgledy-piggledy, without regard to shape, order, o symmetry. In addition to this, everything had a sombre, grey appearance, for the huge chimneys had been belching forth smoke upon it for years, which, while it did not in the slightest degree appear to affect the inhabitants, robbed it of that freshness and purity which strike one so forcibly when visiting a purely agricultural village. There is an old saying among the people, however, that "they canna addle ony brass witha'at a bit o' grime," and as the Yorkshire people are very fond of that commodity, they do not mind, as we

before intimated, having things made a little dark and dirty in getting it. At the time of which I am writing, however, things looked much better than usual, for it was Saturday evening. The operatives do not usually work after twelve o'clock on that day, so the smoke and dust which come from the mills in ordinary working hours did not now appear, and the people who a few hours before were besmeared with smut and dirt, were now to be seen dressed in clean attire, apparently enjoying their half-holiday.

Coming from one of the houses, which was rather superior to the ordinary run of the cottages, was an old man with a book under his arm. He made his way across a plot of ground which, in spite of the hot weather, was occupied by some boys in a fiercely contested game of cricket, and after cracking a joke with one or two of them, turned up the village street, with a brisk step, as though he had some important business on hand. He had not gone far when he saw, coming out of a small grocer's shop, a young, thoughtful-looking man, with whom he at once exchanged greetings.

"Hast a seen un?" asked the old man.

"No," said the other, "but he's come, for our Mary Ann wer at the staashun last neeght, and t' station measther told her that t' new passon had come by tha haaf past eight train."

"Ah, dost a knaw wheare he stayed laast night?"

"No, but I heerd he wur to stay at circuit stewards, 't ony raate Ashton's Dick wur there wi' the carriage to meet un."

"Did t' station measther say what kind ov a chap he wur then, Jack, lad?"

"He said he wur a young-looking chap, oul countryfied, tha knowst, wi' trousers that wur too short in t' legs, a boany kind o' fella, and noan a bit like a passon. However, I hope a'll do us guid, and praich sa'and doctrine, and fill t' chapel."

"Hi, well we mun get on, we're a bit late for tea as 'tis, and I expect he'll be in t' school-room by the time we get there, and I want to make un feel at-home, especially as this is t' first young praicher we've had, and I hear he's just come from whoam."

"What, Measther Dixon, ain't he bin to college, like all t' passons do now-a-day?"

"Noa, Jack, lad, he's been trainin' at good old Measther Merton's house, him as wur president one year; he's superannuated, tha know'st, and settled down where this chap's come fra, and soa he's bin takin' lessons ov him for more'n three years. I heerd he'd passed his examinations in fust raate style."

"Well, ef he con praich as well as some o' t' locals, I shall be satisfied, but I bean't much in favour of these pas sons."

By this time they had reached the chapel, which, like many of the Yorkshire Methodist chapels, was a noble-looking structure. No pains or expense had been spared in its building or fitting up, and the tasteful decorations of the interior showed that however true the saying might be of the love of Yorkshiremen for money, they had been liberal in their contributions towards the beautifying of the house of God.

At the back of the chapel was a commodious school-room, in which a good number of people had congregated. They seemed to be waiting for the coming of some one before commencing operations on the tea-cakes, bread and butter, currant loaves, and other good eatable food which was spread in a very bountiful manner along two tables.

The two friends who had designated each other as "Jack" and "Measther Dixon," came in and looked around, but not appearing to see the person they expected, looked rather longingly towards the tea-tables.

Presently the door again opened, and two more entered.

Instantly a murmur went around the room and a look of eager curiosity was directed towards them.

The one was a man about fifty years of age, with a strong, rugged countenance, deep-set, shrewd-looking eyes, hair somewhat slightly turned to grey, of medium height, but rather stoutly built. The other was quite a young man, evidently not more than two or three and twenty; his cheeks had the glow of health upon them; and were slightly tanned, as though he had lived much in the open air, and yet there was a look in his great dark eyes which indicated that he had spent many an hour poring over books; his hair was coal black, and was tossed carelessly back over a fine intellectual-looking forehead; indeed the whole face told plainly of great thinking powers. He was not good-looking, however, in the ordinary sense of the word; indeed, to look at him for the first time, he was not very prepossessing. He looked shy and awkward, as though unused to society, and as though he did not know what to do with his long limbs. Moreover, while his face told of great force of character, and his eyes and forehead showed mental powers of more than ordinary degree, something in his appearance suggested to you that he did not know how to use his brains, any more than he knew how to use his limbs.

It was anything but a pleasant situation in which he was placed; more than a hundred eyes rested criticisingly on him as if they wanted to sum up his excellencies and failings at a glance; and he being very sensitive, looked confused and uncomfortable.

The gentleman who entered the room with him appeared to understand the state of things, and to break the deep hush which had settled on the people made a movement as if to speak.

"Mr. Ashton's going to speak," said the people one to another, and for an instant the attention was diverted from the younger man of the two.

"My dear friends," said the gentleman designated as "Mr. Ashton," "I am sure I express your feeling, when I say we are all very glad to see our new minister among us. I am not going to tell you of his qualities at this time, for I know that you will have plenty of chances to estimate them for yourself in the near future. I only wish to assure our friend, the Rev. Jabez Easterbrook, at this our first meeting, that he is heartily welcomed among you."

A hearty round of applause followed these words, and from the somewhat harsh and rugged features of many who were present there gleamed an expression of sympathy which showed that their applause was not merely an empty sound, but the expression of their true feeling.

The young man did not speak in reply to this; he simply acknowledged their welcome by a slight inclination of the head, and then, with a look of relief, turned to Mr. Ashton, and the two sat down side by side at one of the tea-tables.

The people were evidently not at all displeased at his not making a speech at this time, indeed most of them thought the better of him because of it; for however fond the Yorkshire people are of a thoughtful, earnest address, they believe in it being given at the proper time and place, and as drinking tea was then the order of the day, they were glad to commence operations at once.

The church in which the young minister had chiefly come to labour was not an insignificant one. It had one hundred and eighty members on the church books, beside about forty on trial; the members on the whole were by no means poor, several of them, indeed, being in very affluent circumstances; while the vast majority, being operatives at the various woollen mills in the neighbourhood, earned a good and steady wage. Hence it was that Heathertown Church was considered as one of, if not the most important church in the circuit. Moreover, the people not only possessed fair means and a beautiful building, but they prided them-

selves upon being very earnest; earnest in prayer, and strong in faith, which they thought, and thought rightly, were the chief essentials to prosperity. They were also thorough Methodists, and although the class meetings were not so well attended as some desired, they prided themselves on their close adherence to old forms and old rules, together with the fact that from the pulpit the Scriptures as interpreted by John Wesley were faithfully proclaimed.

A new spirit, however, had been infused during the last year or two. The younger portion of the congregation had been well educated, indeed many of the young men had pursued the higher branches of learning at the colleges which they attended. These young people were loud in their demands for an educated ministry, for although they said they did not at all disparage the local ministry, they desired some one amongst them who would be able to sympathise with them, and who, having plenty of time for study, would be able to help them in their difficulties. This was for a long time objected to, but finding that the more educated portion of their congregation was leaving the church, the objectors had at last yielded. As a consequence, and also owing to the recommendation of the Rev. John Merton, who had many years before been a highly respected and well-beloved minister in the circuit, they had invited the young man whom we have just introduced to the reader's notice.

Jabez Easterbrook, as his looks intimated, was a young man of no ordinary powers; although as yet they had not been properly developed. True, he had studied under the supervision of a good and useful man, for between two and three years, but his course of study was very circumscribed, and from the fact that his examination necessitated a knowledge of such books as *Watson's Institutes*, and other works written previous to that, he was well versed in the orthodox answers given to objectors a hundred years ago; yet

knew little or nothing of the more subtle kind of unbelief which has found expression in modern times. He knew *Butler's Analogy* almost by heart, and while the book had done him good, as it must do almost any man who reads it, yet it did not bear expressly on the objections of the times in which we live. But this was not all. Owing to the instruction of his tutor and the books he had read, he fancied that his creed contained all the truth; that whatever disagreed with his views must be wrong, because he had arrived at absolute truth on the subject of theology. Now and then, however, in his sermons and speeches he would enunciate principles which, if followed out to their logical sequence, did not in any way agree with the tenets he held. He did not seem conscious of this however, and thus to a critical listener his arguments and statements contradicted themselves. What his mind wanted was freedom, for, as a rule, he tested his beliefs, and tested the truth of doctrines not by broad general principles, and great established truth but by certain crude ideas of his own. Leaving the intellectual side of his nature for his moral, no one could look at him closely, or be in his company for five minutes without realising that they were in the presence of a manly, honest, true, young fellow. Whatever his theological beliefs might be, his heart was true, his life was noble, and he hated all that was false as he hated the devil. Whatever might be his ability to help the young men of the church in their difficulties, they would have his deepest and truest sympathies, and however opposed to his teachings his congregation might be, they would be able to point to him as an exemplary Christian.

Presently the eating and drinking came to an end, and the people congregated themselves in the chapel, where before long the meeting for the reception of the new minister commenced. The superintendent of the circuit, who had not been able to come to the tea, commenced the meeting,

and the young minister was delighted with the hearty yet beautiful singing which he heard. He had never been to Yorkshire before, and living as he had done in a rural district, he had not been in the habit of hearing such singing as he heard that evening. Indeed, I doubt whether there is any part of England where the musical talent is more cultivated than in Yorkshire, for not only do they sing heartily, but correctly, and with great taste.

On the platform were seated some of the oldest workers in the circuit, all with a very critical look upon their faces, yet all apparently having the desire to give their minister a hearty welcome.

Mr. Ashton took the chair, and in a few appropriate words referred to the object of their meeting, and then called upon John Dixon to speak.

There was a rugged force in the old man's speech which told with a large portion of the audience, and a quaint humour that was much enjoyed. "The young man," said John, "is coom amo' foak that doant put on. He sees us just as we be, and if he makes hissen at whoam wi' us, we shall like t' chap all t' better. He seems a decent lad, and we hope he'll prove as good as he seems, for, after all, the trial of the puddin' is in the eatin.' We want our young man to be a praicher as'll not run away wi' new-fangled notions, but stick t' owd lines and not grow a't o' his faather's cloas. We want t' simple gospel, not science, t' great atoanment for sin, and not philosophy."

This was the gist of the old man's speech, which was succeeded by others of a similar character, each speaker giving expression to his own views as to a minister's work. One lay great stress on visiting, another on business capacity, another on sympathy with the poor, but all hoped that Jabez would stick to the old lines, abide by the old landmarks, and preach the old soul-saving truths.

The meeting was beginning to get somewhat monotonous,

when a young man was called on to speak. There was something in his presence which aroused the somewhat sleepy attention of the people. He spoke with fluency and force, and touched upon the subject of a minister's work in a different manner from what the rest had done. He said he quite concurred with his friends in saying they hoped Mr. Easterbrook would preach the Gospel of Christ, for truly they wanted nothing else, and although it was far from his intention to tell him how to preach, he looked forward with pleasure to hearing him, for he hoped he would be not only a preacher, but that he would be a teacher. Jesus Christ was a teacher, and St. Paul was a teacher, and although their mode of teaching was, in the age in which they lived, to a large extent discarded, yet, after the lapse of years, the world could see its grandeur and its power. He found, he said, that there were many subtle forces in the Church at the present time; forces which were causing them to leave the old landmarks. The revelations of science were said to disagree with the Scriptures, and they wanted enlightenment on such matters. Moreover, one of the speakers had said that he hoped the new minister would abide by the old lines of thought and teaching; he could not say that such was his desire, neither, on the other hand, did he hope he would be led away by the so-called modern thought; he simply hoped Mr. Easterbrook would teach his honest convictions, whether they agreed with old lines or new ones. He had been reading that very day a poem by one of the great American poets, entitled "The Preacher," and one of the couplets in the poem ran something like the following:

> "In the church of the wilderness Edwards wrought,
> Forging his creed at the anvil of *thought*."

His fear was that this was not generally the case; that if we were Methodists, or Baptists, or Episcopalians, we

accepted the creed of our churches without intelligent conviction. What we wanted was truth, and it was the truth that must and would set us free.

Jabez Easterbrook, as he heard this speech, was in somewhat of a dilemma; he had not looked at the work of the ministry in this light. He came to Heathertown with an earnest desire to help the people, but he had not conceived the kind of difficulties which were hinted at by the young man who had just spoken, and because he had not thought about them, they, on their first appearance, appeared to him meaningless and absurd.

Presently it came to his turn to speak, and when he rose to do so was heartily applauded. His voice was clear and strong, his enunciation was good, his style was impressive, but the sentiments he uttered were crude and narrow. As he went on with his speech a look of disappointment settled on the faces of many of the young people, while the older ones nodded to each other with a look of approval. He seemed to regard this life as of but very little importance, and quoted the old hymn that nothing was worth a thought beneath, but how they might escape the death that never dies. He did not see, he said, that religion had anything to do with science (Paul warned his pupil against it), nor with politics; what religion was intended to do was to save people from hell. There were two states of existence in the future—one blessed, the other cursed; the Gospel was intended to make men fit for the blessed state. Sometimes, however, he seemed to break away from this narrow, conventional groove, and brilliant statements would fall from his lips, the sentiment of which was altogether opposed to the general tenor of his remarks; and thus, when he sat down, scarcely one definite opinion was formed about him.

Such was his introduction to the people of the village of Heathertown, and such was the state of his mind and feeling. He was, as I have said, intelligent, yet bigoted,

sympathetic, yet narrow ; while the people amongst whom he had come to labour were rugged, yet honest, settled in their opinions, at the same time possessed of a large amount of common-sense. What will be the effect of his sojourn among them? What effect will his labours have? What will be the consequence of his being brought into contact with them? Who will be the greatest teacher, the preacher or the people? Who will receive the greatest benefit, he or they? We shall see.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST DIFFICULTIES.

JABEZ EASTERBROOK was staying with Mr. Richard Ashton the gentleman who introduced him at the tea-table, and the two walked home together after the meeting. Mr. Ashton was the steward for the Moortown circuit, and hence was a man of no little importance among the chapel-going people. He was, moreover, a man of considerable importance in the neighbourhood. He was the largest woollen manufacturer in the district, and hence one of the greatest employers of labour; he was also the chairman of the Local Board; and took the lead in most of the social and political questions of the day.

He had not been very much pleased with the young minister as yet, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that he had not agreed with many of his views; but being a charitable man, was not one to condemn quickly.

As the two walked up the carriage drive which led to Heathertown Grange, they realised that a barrier existed between them, that although belonging to the same Church, they lived in two different worlds of thought, and their sympathies were far from being in common. Indeed, Jabez Easterbrook felt that either Mr. Ashton, and his son who had spoken at the meeting, were very heterodox, or he had not been rightly instructed in the path of knowledge.

As they entered the door of the house they were met by

a person Jabez had not seen before. This was a young lady. She was apparently about nineteen years of age, tall, and well proportioned. Her face was not easy to describe, for there was that about it which is not commonly seen among the ordinary class, or indeed among any class of young girls. Her forehead was broad and high, the perceptive and reflective powers being both largely developed. Her eyes were large, dark, and brilliant, but they were destitute of tenderness or sympathy. They denoted great intelligence and language, but there was nothing of the spiritual; nothing which denoted an inward sight was visible. The nose was straight, and finely chiselled, indicating great sensitiveness; the mouth was firm and clearly cut, while the chin suggested great energy of character, and a somewhat unyielding nature. It was a face to be admired for its power, rather than for its womanliness.

"This is my daughter Margaret," said Mr. Ashton, at the same time introducing Jabez to the young lady.

She bestowed a haughty stare on the young minister, and then, after an icy greeting, turned away her head as though he were unworthy of her notice.

She had been away staying with some friends, and had only that evening arrived home. Upon being told that the young Methodist minister was staying at their house a few days until he should find convenient lodgings, she had shrugged her shoulders, given expression to a very sneering remark about sanctified Methodists, and then turned to Darwin's *Descent of Man*, to have what she termed "a little sensible society."

Margaret Ashton was no ordinary girl. She had read books, and studied subjects which but very few girls ever dream about. She had read Von Hartmann's *Pessimism* and Compte's *Positivism*. She had read Emerson until her opinions became very pantheistic, and then she pored over Spinoza's works, in order to have her opinions confirmed.

She had caused her father to build her an observatory, and to buy her a powerful telescope, and there, on star-lit nights, you might find her studying the heavens, and reading the works of celebrated astronomers. Her religious beliefs, if she had any at all, were, as we shall find, very vague and misty: hence she had very little sympathy with either church or chapel going. True, she attended religious services, but while doing so did very little but criticise. She was very sarcastic in her speech to those who had but little acquaintance with her favourite studies, and was very haughty and imperious in her disposition. Her friends' verdict concerning her was that she had more head than heart, indeed some said she had a great deal of head, and a very little of heart. The truth was, the deeper parts of her nature had never been touched; she certainly had a conscience, but she had never experienced the unspeakable longings of a soul thirsting for God. Hers was an intellectual life, not a spiritual; her thinking powers had been cultivated and developed; but her higher being had lain dormant, and only the touch of the hand of God could arouse it from its lethargy.

She left Jabez and her father directly she had been introduced to the former, for which the young minister was very glad, as he felt anything but comfortable under her scrutinising gaze. Before long, however, he was brought into her society again, for the supper bell rang, and to his dismay he found himself seated beside her.

At the head of the table sat Mrs. Ashton, a kind, motherly-looking lady, whom anyone could scarcely help loving. Opposite the young minister sat Reginald Ashton, the young man who had spoken at the meeting, and who had represented the younger part of the church. Mrs. Ashton, with that tact and delicacy which characterises those ladies who feel an interest in young people who are away from their home and friends, spoke kindly to Jabez, and asked him

what he thought of the chapel and the people, and expressed a hope that he would be happy and useful.

"I trust I shall be both, Mrs. Ashton," said Jabez quietly, "especially the latter."

"You will find the Yorkshire people kind, although rough," said Reginald; "and in spite of their lack of polish and culture, you will quickly realise that they possess no small amount of judgment and thinking power."

"From the little I saw of them," replied Easterbrook, "I can readily believe that."

"Did they give you the impression that they were intelligent?" said Margaret, speaking for the first time.

"They did, indeed, and also impressed me with the sense of the rugged force of their character."

"Keen observation must be a great blessing, for by it some people are able to find out wonderful things," she replied in a sarcastic tone of voice.

Jabez Easterbrook looked at her for a moment in astonishment. He was not quite certain whether this remark was an implied sneer; or whether she simply expressed an idea passing through her mind at the time.

At this juncture another gentleman entered the room who was introduced as Mr. Frederick Warren, and was evidently an old friend of the family. He was a dapper-looking young man, with a fair smooth face, which indicated neither goodness nor badness. He was dressed according to the latest fashion; had the orthodox ring on his little finger, and gold albert hanging on his vest; but there was neither force nor power in his presence, which you instinctively feel when some men are introduced to you.

He was the only son of Mr. Vernon Warren, the representative of one of the oldest families in the neighbourhood. He would on his father's death inherit a large amount of property, and was regarded by the marriageable young ladies in the district, also by their mothers, as a very fine catch.

and consequently was petted and fawned upon to his heart's content. For three or four years many endeavours had been made to entrap him into a marriage, but as yet they had been unsuccessful, owing to the fact that he had set his affections—such as he had—on Miss Margaret Ashton, the young lady just introduced to the reader's notice. He had not as yet named it to her, indeed, he had never been able to muster sufficient courage, for when he had tried to lead the conversation into that channel, she had, by that tact, peculiar to some ladies, talked in such a way as to make it next to impossible for him to continue. He was, however, on terms of close intimacy with the family, and Margaret always seemed to treat him with great kindness and consideration.

As a consequence of his entering the supper-room, Jabez Easterbrook did not reply to Margaret Ashton's sarcastic and almost rude remark; but listened to the light talk of young Warren, who seemed very enthusiastic about a ball that the committee of the Conservative Club were arranging in order to bring the *élite* of the neighbourhood together.

"I hope," he said, turning to the young minister, "that you will be able to be present on that occasion. Of course, I don't know what your politics are; but it does not matter in this case, as it is being got up regardless of political opinion.

"Might I ask," said Jabez, "what the programme of the evening is to be?"

"Music and dancing," replied Warren.

"During the whole evening?"

"Oh! there'll be refreshments, of course."

Jabez smiled. "I am afraid," he said, "that I should not be able to participate in its pleasures."

"Oh, I see, you are a minister, and do not believe in dancing."

"I certainly am afraid the time would hang very heavily on my hands."

Frederick Warren felt somewhat piqued by Easterbrook's reply, and coloured deeply.

"Mr. Warren," said Margaret, "I am surprised at your asking Mr. Easterbrook to attend a scene of so much frivolity; you ought to know that his position and profession would make him hold up his hands with pious horror at the thought of such a thing. Why, if I am not misinformed, dancing is strictly prohibited by the Methodists; and how can you think that the spiritual adviser of the Methodist Church would think of taking part in such a sinful thing as dancing?"

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Ashton had heard this caustic speech of Margaret's, as something had for the moment engaged their attention; perhaps, if they had, it would not have been rebuked, for Margaret was their only daughter, and somewhat spoiled. Reginald Ashton had heard it, however, and a merry smile played around his mouth, as he watched the confused look on Easterbrook's face.

The young minister made no reply. This was the second time during the evening that his host's daughter had spoken almost sneeringly concerning him, and he felt hurt. He did not mind the words so much, but the tone in which she had spoken implied that he was to her an object for contempt.

Warren, however, was pleased by the remark. It suited his feelings, and opened up a way by which he could answer the slighting words of this rustic stranger.

"I think dancing is an elegant and useful accomplishment," he said warmly. "It makes an evening pass pleasantly, and more than that, adds grace to one's movements. However, that is doubtless a matter of no importance to this gentleman; evidently he thinks it beneath his notice," and he cast a contemptuous glance on the angular form and badly-fitting

clothes of Easterbrook, as though he had completely demolished him by what he thought a sharp speech.

Jabez looked at him closely, and seemed to measure the whole man at a glance, while he himself was carefully watched by both Reginald and Margaret, for they wanted to see his powers tested.

"You are right," he said, looking straight in Warren's eyes as he spoke, "the cultivation of graceful bodily movements is of but little importance to me."

"Then, Mr. Easterbrook," said Warren quizzically, as though he were playing with one of inferior intellect, "would you mind telling me *what* you believe in cultivating?"

"My brains, sir," said Jabez, quietly, but with a smile.

Frederick Warren, although not of quick perception, caught the point of Easterbrook's reply, and felt that he had been beaten. He saw the flash of Margaret's eye, and as Reginald Ashton turned the conversation on some other subject, he was sure they enjoyed his defeat, which was the more cutting owing to the fact that he knew, as Easterbrook had implied, that he, while he had cultivated the art of dancing very assiduously, had, nevertheless, spent but very little time in study. He determined, however, that before the evening was over he would make the young minister feel the sting of defeat far sharper than he had felt it, and was on the look-out for his opportunity.

While Margaret's opinion of Jabez was anything but favourable, it certainly did rise at his quiet reply, and when they repaired to the drawing-room she accepted his offered arm: at the same time trying to devise some means by which she might confuse him, and thus give Frederick Warren an opportunity of retaliation.

The drawing-room was an embodiment of both comfort and elegance. The wax candles shed a pale yet clear light over the furniture, and showed to advantage the delicate decorations which were to be seen on every hand. Each

of the young people felt this as they sat down, and each seemed to participate in the pleasure which persons of taste naturally feel when surrounded by that which is pleasing to the artistic eye. Mr. and Mrs. Ashton had gone out on the lawn for a quiet evening walk, and had left the younger ones to enjoy themselves as best they could.

There was a very marked contrast in the appearance of each of the four. Frederick Warren, short, stout, florid-looking, with a face not unlike a full-moon, tricked out in all the foppery of this our nineteenth century. Reginald Ashton, a little above the medium height, delicately built, fine classical face, yet beaming with kindness and sympathy. Jabez Easterbrook, tall, angular, with a rugged, powerful face, and his hair thrown carelessly back over his forehead. Margaret Ashton, beautiful, yet haughty; elegance and refinement stamped on her every movement, yet satirical in the highest degree.

Margaret spoke first.

"You seem to forget, Mr. Warren," she said, "that religion and pleasure are entirely opposed to each other, by that I mean the Methodist religion, and thus it should cause you no surprise that Mr. Easterbrook should decline your kind invitation. You should know that, according to their creed, our bodies were not given us to use, except in the most circumspect manner possible. Indeed, John Wesley, who is almost canonised among them, forbade even the children to play. I am sure," she continued, turning to Jabez, "you have a terrible work before you, for the young people of Heathertown, being left so long without a spiritual adviser, have become awfully depraved. At the Whitsuntide festivals they actually play 'French Tag,' and 'The Jolly Miller,' which I am sure John Wesley would never have sanctioned, and consequently will be severely condemned by you."

Jabez watched her face closely, but he could detect no

particular expression, except that she looked more cynical than usual. The sarcastic tone of voice, however, could not be mistaken, and for a moment, a positive dislike for her crept into his heart, and he was tempted to speak hastily. He conquered the feeling, however, and replied quietly:

"Either you or I have been misinformed with regard to Methodism, Miss Ashton. It is true John Wesley had curious notions about children and their treatment; but we do not hold him as infallible, neither do we pretend to believe in all he said."

"Oh, then I have been misinformed; papa told me some time ago that you had to believe in the theology as taught by John Wesley or you could not become a minister."

"Well, that is so to a very large extent, that is, as far as the fundamental doctrines of Christianity go."

"Oh, I see," she replied, "the fundamental doctrines; by that, I suppose, you mean the important and crucial doctrines."

"Yes, that is so."

"Then I suppose there has been no light, no progress in our search after truth, no means of getting at the truth, and no great teacher and thinker since his day?"

"I do not say so, but truth is unalterable."

"And you believe that John Wesley found it all?"

'Oh, no, certainly, I do not believe it."

"Then why do you pin your faith to his creed? You admit that you cannot become a Methodist minister unless you believe in the fundamental doctrines as taught by John Wesley, and thus you have the dead hand of the past pressing upon your mind; you must be kept within the limits of his belief, you dare not have convictions outside his groove of thought, and thus you are bound down to the darkness of a hundred years ago."

Margaret seemed to have forgotten that she had aimed at giving Frederick Warren a chance of fencing with, and

defeating, Easterbrook; but recollecting her design and knowing something of Warren's belief, she went on, before Easterbrook had time to reply:

"After all, what is religion but being a slave to the past? the belief in the history of a pagan nation, a concurrence with the superstitions of past ages?"

"Margaret," said Reginald, "do not talk so wildly, and do not introduce such subjects as that now."

"Why not, Reginald? It seems to me I could not have a better time to introduce these subjects. I have my doubts and difficulties, so has Mr. Warren, while Mr. Easterbrook has come here as a spiritual adviser and teacher and will be able, perhaps, in a few minutes, to set us all right."

Jabez had by this time formed his opinion with regard to Margaret, and he suspected her design in speaking as she had done. This put him on his metal, and he determined to stand by his guns manfully.

"Religion, Miss Ashton, is not simply being a slave to the past. It is a belief in an intelligent, loving God, Who made and rules all things, it is obedience to the dictates of His will."

"Then the essence of religion is a belief in God. How do you know there is a God? Did you ever see Him?"

"In one sense, no. Looking at things around me from a material standpoint, I do not see God. Looking beneath the mere surface of things, I see God in everything, everywhere. Every cloud in the sky, every daisy in the field tells me of a God."

Frederick Warren had for a long time wanted to speak, and now he felt his opportunity had come.

"Yes, Mr. Easterbrook," he said, "but your professed possession of a kind of second sight is not sufficient to establish your position. We want a better proof of the existence of God than that. It may suit *you*, but I am

more difficult to convince. I cannot look beneath the material surface as you call it, I can't see God in the clouds, and in the flowers," and he settled himself in his chair as though his answer was unanswerable.

Jabez looked at him as he had done at the supper table, and watched his fat, florid face, the diminutive forehead, and his dull eyes.

"No, I don't think you can," he said, slowly.

Again Warren felt the point of the answer, and Margaret looked on Reginald and smiled; but the young heir, the petted member of society, did not know when he was beaten. He felt sure he could crush his antagonist even yet; it was together opposed to the opinion he had formed of himself, that he could be beaten in argument by this rustic stranger.

"No doubt you think that a smart answer, Mr. Easterbrook, but still, I am not convinced. However, as you are possessed of so much light, you may be able to shed some of it on the darkened inhabitants of this neighbourhood."

Jabez felt the implied sneer here, and for a moment he felt inclined to answer in the same spirit, thinking it the best way to deal with him, but not wanting to stir up a bitter feeling, and also desiring to do good if possible, he said kindly:

"I admit the difficulty in *proving* the existence of God, Mr. Warren; still I think we have evidences strong and clear for warranting us in our belief."

"I do not see them," he said lottily; "where are they?"

"Perhaps you do not wish to," replied Jabez.

"Oh, yes, I should like to have evidences, for surely there should be such, because on their supposed existence millions of money have been spent on parsons and their doings."

"Well then," replied Jabez, not appearing to notice the tone in which this was spoken, "the strongest evidence exists, I think, in ourselves, our natures demand a God. This is seen the wide world over, every kindred, every tribe

have their belief in God, and nothing else will satisfy them. Every man has a religious feeling."

Frederick Warren was determined that he would not be beaten, and he thought from the conciliatory tone in which Jabez had given his last two or three answers that he was getting afraid of him, so he said warmly:

"Your answer, sir, is unsound, untrue, there is not the universal demand for a God that you say there is. There are men who have no longings for God, no religious feeling."

"Did you ever know any one who had not?" asked Jabez.

"Yes, sir, I have no longings for God, no religious feeling."

This was the first idea that Jabez had that Frederick Warren pretended to be an unbeliever, and as he made his revelation, Margaret and Reginald again watched the young minister's face. Jabez felt in a moment that the unbelief was a mere boast of the young man, who thought it sounded large to claim relief from religious belief, and as if unconsciously, he began smoothing a large cat that lay stretched on the rug.

"You have no longing for God, no religious feeling," he said. "Neither has this cat, poor pussy."

The words were spoken so quietly, and their meaning so cleverly implied, that both Margaret and Reginald laughed aloud, while Warren, who scarcely caught the meaning, stared vacantly at them; but the conversation ended here, as Mr. and Mrs. Ashton then entered the room.

CHAPTER III.

JACK BRAG.

Shortly after the conversation which we recorded in the last chapter, Frederick Warren started for his home, and the night being fine, the young people said they would walk a part of the way with him. Their path led through some meadows, which took them quite away from the village, and as they sauntered along beneath the bright light of the moon, the sweet stillness of the summer night seemed to woo the young minister away from his excited feelings, into a state of rest and peace. The faint twitter of the birds, which he sometimes heard, the rippling of the little brook which found its way down the valley in the near distance, and the occasional sounds of laughter which were wafted to them from the village, all tended to soften his feelings, and soothe his excited nerves. Under the influence of the calm night, he wished he had not tilted with young Warren, who, in spite of everything, smarted at the indignity under which he conceived he had suffered; but not being a bad fellow at heart, he was pocketing his discomfiture as well as he could. It needed but little provocation, however, to induce him to try and pay back with interest the whipping at repartee which he had received. Margaret was strangely silent, as though something was working in her mind which would not allow her to speak. Her bright eagle eye was

fixed on a brilliant star, that was slowly setting behind the western hill, and her lips parted sometimes, as though she wanted to speak; but the great hush that reigned, seemed to forbid the words that would be inadequate to express her feelings.

At last Reginald Ashton spoke.

"What a magnificent night," he said. "See how the white vapour rises from the valley and slowly ascends towards the sky; how sombre the shadowy outlines of the hills look, and how brightly Venus shines, making herself look like a queen among the stars."

"I wonder," said Easterbrook, as if musing, "whether those stars are inhabited by beings similar to ourselves?"

"I hope we may never know," said Margaret, with an almost husky tone of voice. "I would rather that they should remain in their glorious mystery. Oh, to think of the infinite space, and of those stars darting through it with more than lightning speed. See, while Venus is setting behind the Western hills, Jupiter is rising behind the Eastern. How grand, how infinitely grand!"

"How great God must be," said Jabez.

Margaret turned on him almost savagely.

"God!" she exclaimed. "Yes, but not the little God of your creed and theologies. Not the little God that is confined to your little narrow notions. If there is a God at all, He cannot be the petty, jealous creature which you Methodists make Him out to be."

Jabez was silent, as were indeed the rest. Reginald evidently knew something of the moods and feelings of his sister, while Warren appeared afraid to speak.

Margaret was evidently moved deeply; she did not seem to care whose feelings she might hurt, or how she might trample on beliefs which so many hold sacred.

"Who," she went on, "can bring down the Great Some-

thing who made all things into a creed of six lines? Think of the stars, millions upon millions of miles away, countless in number, yet all governed by immutable laws, and then think of the little God which Christians tell us we must worship. How different is the God of this glorious night to the God which caused the fires of Smithfield and Oxford, or the gods of the heathen nations who, they believe, lead them on to bloodshed and war! The God of this night must be sublime indeed, above such petty feelings as those we hear ascribed to Him."

Perhaps Jabez was not wise in replying. I do not think he was, for she was strangely and almost unwarrantably excited, and hence not in a fit state to hear what he might say. Still his reply was not altogether irrelevant.

"I have never spent a winter in Yorkshire," he said, "but down in my home I have heard the angry wind sob its way up the valleys, and through the branches of the leafless trees. I have seen the snow blown hither and thither in blinding drifts, and because of the wild weather, many of the poor families have been deprived even of the common necessities of life. I have read, too, that in Yorkshire the very hills which now appear in their soft and dusky outlines, are sometimes covered with snow, while at other times the maddened winds sweep over them, carrying dire desolation. Surely the same God who gave us this sublime night, also gave us the storm cloud and the cold?"

"Admitting that," she said, "the sublime God of the orm is far grander than your Methodist God. What is the world the better for its religions, that is, its systematised religions? Would not the God of this glorious night do more for the world than the God who needs so much begging and beseeching to do anything for you?"

Jabez began to feel very uncomfortable. He had never expected such an experience as this. He had been led over strange ground, and he did not feel sure about his footing.

His creeds, some of them, at any rate, seemed rather small as he heard the peculiar words of this young lady. He felt, too, that she regarded him as a very inferior person, and it did not help him to think clearly and truly. Had he not realised the religion of Christ in his heart, he must have felt a great shock, even although the words he had heard might be easily answered. As it was he was silenced, but determined to think out the matter in his private hours. He felt somehow that he could in time reply to all she had said, but now something sealed his lips.

Frederick Warren now thought it was time for him to speak.

"Miss Ashton is right," he said. "The history of the Christian Church is one of strife, malice, narrowness, bigotry, hate, bloodshed. Meanwhile the miserable are left miserable still, the starving are left starving still."

Reginald, who had been listening quietly, said,

"Yes, Fred, that is so to a large extent, but not altogether; much has been done, and our religion teaches us to care for the miserable, to care for the starving. Hence it is for us to try and do all the good we can."

"But religion does not help us to do this, neither is philanthropy confined to religious people," was the reply.

They were at this time walking past a rather dangerous place. On their right hand was the green field, but on their left was a steep declivity. Sometime in the past, forces had been at work which had carried away a large quantity of earth, or else there had been a revulsion underneath the soil which had caused a deep hollow. The sides of the ravine were covered with brambles, and stunted vegetation of various sorts, while at the bottom babbled a brook, whose source was a little way up by the side of the hill.

As they walked on they heard a noise which made them stop their conversation and listen. They had not to wait

long, for soon the sound was repeated. It was a low moaning sound.

"Someone has evidently fallen down here, and got hurt," said Reginald.

"Some drunken beast, I'll warrant," replied Warren; "let him lie there, it will do him good."

Another noise came from the hollow, one which could not be mistaken. It was a drunken hiccup, then a cry for help.

"I thought so," exclaimed Warren. "It is Nick Kent, Jack Brag, or some such wife-beating rascal; let him lie there, it is a nice night, and he'll be sad and sober by the morning."

While he was speaking, Jabez had been slowly letting himself down, by means of catching hold of the brambles and brushwood, towards the spot from whence the sound had come, and ere long reached it.

There he found a large, strongly-built man lying. His legs and part of his body were stretched in the water, but his head had been kept above it by means of a clump of rushes; otherwise he must have been drowned, for he seemed powerless to move.

"What is the matter, my good fellow?" said Jabez.

His only reply was an oath and a groan.

"What is your name?" he asked again.

"Jaack (hic) Bra-ag," was the reply.

"I told you so," shouted Warren; "let the brute be, it will teach him a lesson."

"No," replied Jabez, "I am going to take him home."

"What for, you'll only encourage him to get drunk again, besides, how can you touch such a drunken beast?"

"Because he's a man and he's my brother."

Warren gave a senseless titter at this, while Margaret laughed scornfully and mentioned something about *Don Quixote.*

Meanwhile Jabez had lifted the man's head, which seemed to help him to gather back his scattered senses.

"Where do you live?" asked Jabez.

"Baker's-loine."

"How far is it?"

"Jist ovver (hic) t' hill."

"Do you think you can walk if I help you?"

"A'll try as weel as I con."

Jabez helped the rough collier on to his feet, and sought to lead him down the ravine to a spot where the sides were less steep. It was with difficulty he did so, for the road was rough and the man was very drunk; moreover, he had hurt one of his legs in his fall, and had not Reginald come to his aid it must have been a considerable time before he could have got him on the footpath again.

During the time Jabez and Reginald were getting the man out of the ravine, Warren had been giving expression to some very poor jokes at their expense, while Margaret seemed to enjoy what she termed "the ridiculous scene."

Jack Brag looked at them with drunken gravity as soon as he was brought up to the spot where they stood, and seemed to realise the disgust with which both of them looked at him.

"Now, Reginald," said Margaret, "seeing that you have assisted Mr. Easterbrook in his glorious mission, I think it time for us to return home. Surely this fellow can go home alone."

"You need not trouble about him," said Jabez; "I'll see him safe in his cottage."

"And I will go with you," said Reginald.

"And I will walk back with Miss Ashton," said Warren, evidently delighted with the arrangement.

"No," said Margaret, imperiously. "Reginald must walk back with me, and you, Mr. Warren, can accompany Mr. Easterbrook and his charge."

Warren objected to this very strongly ; but Margaret was firm, and finally Jabez started as Jack Brag's escort with the young heir strutting discontentedly by his side.

They had gone only a few steps when Warren said .

"Could you not manage to get the fellow home without me? I want to hurry back to dad, he's always anxious if I'm late, and I can't assist you."

Jabez gave his consent, and with a smile of contempt watched the young man as he walked rapidly towards his home.

Margaret and Reginald had likewise heard these words, and for a moment a strange look came into Margaret's eyes as she thought of their respective characters.

Jabez had for some time a heavy burden to bear. The man seemed for a few minutes to have nearly lost the use of his limbs, and hence our hero had to bear nearly all his weight, but he grew better after a while, and in due course they reached Baker's Lane, and the cottage built there.

"Will your wife be waiting for you?" asked Jabez.

"Ay, ye need'n goo in."

Evidently the man, though drunk, was ashamed for him to see the interior of his cottage.

"I do not want to do so; I will leave you in your wife's care and then depart."

He knocked at the door, and in answer came an untidy, bedraggled-looking woman.

"Your husband is not well," said Jabez, "so I have accompanied him home."

"Not weel! Dinna tell me; he's drunk agean. Ivvery Sathurday neet its t' same, and once or twice durin' t' week. Ah, ye drunken pig, I wish thee wur dead, I do. Coom, help un in," turning to Jabez, "happen ye made him drunk yoursen."

Jabez explained the circumstances under which he found him.

The woman looked at him curiously. "Who might ye be?" she exclaimed.

Jabez told her.

"T' new passon, be ye? Weel, a fat lot o' good ye'll do, I'm a thinkin'. Passons do nowt but take money out of fowks' pockets and fill ther own."

The man, drunk as he was, resented this insult, and he swore a savage oath.

"Oh, thee't takken up wi't passon, art a? I only hop he'll do tha some good."

Jabez looked around the house, and as he did so he did not wonder at the man going to the public-house. The stone floor was covered with a greasy kind of dirt. There was nothing in the room save a table, covered with unwashed cups and plates, two or three chairs, and a bed. All was dirty and squalid, not excepting the woman.

"Come," said Jabez, "help your husband to bed."

"Not I," said she; "help him thesen."

"She's drunk hersen," said the man, "ne'er heed heer."

The truth was apparent. The woman's insolent words and husky tones could arise from no other source, so, unpleasant as was the duty, he assisted the man to pull off his wet clothes and tumbled him to bed.

"What time will your husband get up to-morrow?" he said, turning to the woman again.

"Not in time to goo and hear ye praich; he ne'er gits up of a Sunday till nooin."

Jabez walked away sorrowfully, and as he wended his way back to Mr. Ashton's house he pondered over the events of the last few hours. He thought of the tea, the meeting, of the conversation afterwards, of the walk across the fields, of the drunken man, of the drunkard's home. Then he thought of himself and his chosen lifework, of the various phases of character he had met, and as he did so he realised how poor, how small, how weak he was.

"There are many kinds of difficulties," he thought, "there are many needs. May God help me to do my work well; may I have wisdom, and grace, and power."

Ere long he reached the house, but before going in he looked upward towards the sky. The moon still shone brightly, the stars still speckled the heavens with wondrous splendour, and as he looked, he thought, and as he thought, his ideas of God became larger, and he realised that there was some truth in Margaret's words, that God could not be confined to a creed. For a minute he let his mind think, unfettered by his creeds. He thought of the wonderful Being who made the stars, and who made laws to govern them, and for a while he became lost in his speculations.

After a while he checked himself.

"After all," he thought, "a study of nature pure and simple only leads one to think of God as a vague abstraction. He is more than that, my inner being tells me so. To Margaret Ashton the thought of God brings no comfort, to me it does. Why? Because to me He is a Person, full of love and mercy. He is revealed to me in Christ as my Father. That blue Heaven, those cold, steely-looking stars, do not tell me that 'God is love,' Christ does. I have a consciousness of God, and that is a kind of *revelation*, but I need more, I need something to tell me what He is."

Then his mind flew back over his ministerial training and of what his tutor had told him.

"I am getting sadly at sea," he exclaimed, "and I have been thinking without my book. Every man is conscious of some kind of God, and yet every man is by nature totally depraved; how can a man with nothing but sin in his heart receive a revelation? I must not let my reason run rampant or I shall get heterodox."

He knocked at the door, which was opened by Mr. Ashton, who received him kindly, after which he soon retired to rest.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST SUNDAY

SUNDAY morning at Yorkshire, bright, clear, and beautiful. The cornfields were ripe unto the harvest, and the golden stalks seemed to be waiting patiently for the scythe. The cattle in the meadows chewed their cuds with lazy content, while the poultry in the farmyards cackled joyously as though the welfare of the world depended on their noises.

Jabez Easterbrook looked out of his bedroom window on the scene around him, and I think he preached all the better that morning because of it. Earth and heaven were full of music and poetry. The bees as they sucked the flowers, the flies as they buzzed hither and thither, the grasshoppers, as they moved their tiny bodies, all added to the bright joyousness of the hour; while the daisies and buttercups in the meadows, the geraniums, the pansies, the roses, and a score of other flowers in the garden, made him feel how beautiful the earth was, and how good it was to live.

The scene of the morning's meal was likewise novel to him. Mrs. Ashton had caused the breakfast table to be placed on the lawn, under the shade of a large laburnum tree, and as he saw Mrs. Ashton's kind, motherly face opposite him, and heard the genial conversation of Reginald Ashton and his father, he felt he had indeed come among friends

Margaret scarcely spoke during the whole of the breakfast

hour. She met the young minister with a cold greeting, and spoke only in monosyllables afterwards. She did not refer to their conversation of the night before, or to his episode with the drunken man; she was evidently in no mood for talk. It was not because she appeared unwell, far from it. Perfect health showed itself on her fine rounded cheek, and in the bright sparkle of her eyes; abundant energy was expressed in every movement of her lithe, graceful figure. Jabez could not help admiring her beauty, although his feeling towards her was not very friendly. Not that he resented her sarcasms, and her evident dislike to him, but he felt that a barrier was raised between them, by an unseen hand, felt that they, because they seemed to have but little common sympathy, must ever be strangers. He had not seen much of society; but he felt that it could not be polite, that it could not be regarded as courteous, to treat another as she had treated him. All her conversation to, and concerning him was satirical in the highest degree, and being by nature sensitive, he felt anything but comfortable in her presence. Hence it was that he was not at all sorry to hear her intention of going to the Established Church that morning, although he could not help feeling that it was a slight to himself. Had he known more about her habits, however, he would have thought but little of this, as it is a custom among many in country villages, to attend the ministry of the parish clergyman in the morning, and that of the dissenting minister at night. Margaret only occasionally went to either, and then more to please her parents, than for any particular desire to join in the worship of God.

The morning service at the chapel was of a very commonplace order. The singing, it is true, was good; but the congregation was small, and the sermon little else than empty platitudes. The young minister took for his text, "For the people had a mind to work;" and while his manner was earnest, and the subject important, the impression made wa

by no means deep or powerful. Still as he was the new minister, the people listened with more than ordinary attention, and did not find very much fault, either with his thoughts, or his mode of expressing them.

After dinner Jabez walked over the hill towards Baker's-lane. He was anxious to see the man whom he had befriended on the previous night, and to try and do him some lasting good. He had refrained from moralising on the previous night, as he knew how useless it was to talk with a man when under the influence of liquor; but he hoped that to-day he would be saddened and penitent, and susceptible to good influences. When he came to the cottage, he found Jack seated on a stool near the doorstep, looking miserable indeed. His pipe was in his mouth, but he did not seem to be aware of it, neither was it alight, and as he looked up and saw Jabez he was so taken aback that it fell from his mouth, and his head hung down from shame.

The young minister was pleased to see this; evidently he had not fallen so low as to cease to be ashamed of his degradation. He felt that while the man felt a consciousness of sin there was hope of reclamation.

"Good afternoon, my friend," said Jabez cheerily.

"Same to ye," was the reply, "and if I'm not mistakken ye are the mon who lugged me home last neet."

Jabez answered in the affirmative.

"Weel, I'm verra much obliged; but I hope ye've noan coom to praich a sermon; I tell tha, lad, thou'st do no gooid wi' me i' that line."

"Nothing is farther from my intention than to preach a sermon; but I thought you might not object to a bit of company, and to tell you the truth, I wanted to have a bit of chat with you about a few matters. You see it's this way: I have found but very few friends in Heathertown as yet, and I want to find some, moreover I want someone to

introduce me to the working men of the village, and I know of no one who can help me better than you."

Jack looked at him keenly, and an expression of inquiry passed over his face.

"Art a' an oily customer," he muttered, "or art a' real? Happen thee't real, for tha behaaved like a mon laast neet. Weel, I've noan so many objections to a bit of chat seein' ye spaik so civil."

"Thank you," said Jabez warmly; and then holding out his hand said, "And may we not be friends?"

"Happen ye doant knaw me," he replied. "I'm Jack Brag, and I'm noan a bit friendly wi' t' passons; besides I do'ant knaw ye, so ther't better no promises be made. I doant believe sa mich i' religion either, for as fur as I con see we're nowt the better for it."

Jabez was a keen observer, and he saw at a glance what kind of man he had to deal with. He saw that in spite of the fact that the man's drinking habits had been slowly ruining him, he still possessed that hard, rugged, common-sense for which the Yorkshire people are so proverbial.

"Never mind about my being a parson," he said, "forget all that, and if you like let's talk about something else besides religion."

"But it's Sunday, and ye art a passon."

Jabez was startled. In his anxiety to help the man he forgot his Sabbatarianism, so he quickly replied,

"Well, then, let's talk about religion."

"Noa," replied the man, "it's nowt i' my line. Politics, now, I could discuss wi' ye, but religion's fit for nowt but bairns, and owd wimmen."

For a minute his narrow training hampered his mind. To talk about secular matters on a Sunday was always regarded by him as a sin, and hence Sunday was to him a day on which only things *ostensibly* religious were indulged in. Then his mind took a broader grasp. "What is sacred?"

he asked himself, and the answer came, "That which is right. Hence everything which has a tendency to make the world better is right, is sacred."

Perhaps some of my readers may think Jabez unwise, and that he did not act up according to his privileges as a Christian minister, for during his chat with Jack Brag he never mentioned religion; he did not refer once to their meeting of the evening previous, he did not ask him to go to Chapel or Church, he simply talked with him about Yorkshire customs and Yorkshire feeling, and by this means he gained the rough collier's confidence. By chatting to him in a kind, friendly way he made him feel that he was regarded as a man and a friend, and not as some inferior animal. And soon the Yorkshireman answered the young minister less brusquely, and after Jabez had told him about his early life, he likewise told about his younger days, of his home, and the influences which were brought to bear upon him. Told him of his having to go to the pit to work when he was eight years old, and of his hardships there; told him how his father used to take him to the public-house, and give him drink until he got to like it, and told him in his quaint Yorkshire manner of his courtship and marriage.

"Ay, it's a curious kind of life I've lived," he said in conclusion; "when I wur a boy, I had nowt scarce but kicks and cuffs, and sin I've bin gowd up, as you may say, it's a hard time I've had. I tell tha, lad, be careful what sort ot a lass thee picks up for a wife. I don't want to say mich agin my lass, for I've been a bad un to her, but I think sometimes if t' house wur a bit more tidy, and t' things more cheerful, I wouldn't want to go to t' public."

"Well, I must be going now," said Jabez, in reply, "but if you should want a friend, why, you know, I shall be in the village; I shall get into my lodgings in a day or two, and if you care to come to see me, I shall be glad to see you."

After the young minister walked away, Jack remained for a long time soliloquising.

"Yon's a nice lad," he muttered, "and noan a bit stuck up. He said nowt about religion, or my bein' drunk last neet, an' he invited me to see un at his lodgin's. Happen I'll go, happen I can tell t' lad a few things for his good, and tak his part if ivver he gits into a row. I'd lick the lad that hurt him, I would and all," and Jack brought down his fist with a heavy thump on his knee.

"Weel, I think I'll go up to St. George and t' Dragon, and have a sup o' ale, and see Nick Kent. I wonder now ef I'll git over t' bay again? I'd noan like for t' young passon to see me soa, it ud be as though I wur throwin' his kindness i' his face. Happen I'll ask t' owd lass to go and see her mother i'steed."

Strange to say, this was done, and Mary Brag agreed to his proposal, although, to use her own terms, "she wur aboon a bit capped when he axed her furst."

Thus it was, by a process which Jack could not have explained, that the rough, dissolute collier had a distaste for the lower things of life, and a touch of liking for the nobler, through being brought into contact with a true, sincere man.

Jabez, too, as he entered the pulpit at the Methodist chapel that evening, felt stronger and better fitted for his service through being brought into contact with the rough Yorkshireman. The chapel was nearly full. The choir had come up in large numbers, and as they sang the first hymn, in which the congregation joined, he realized the power which music has over the mind and heart. One thing however, slightly disconcerted him. He saw, sitting in the back part of the chapel, Margaret Ashton, and he fancied he detected a sarcastic smile playing around her mouth, and he felt sure he would have a keen critic listening to him. He determined, however, that he would boldly speak out

the words that God had given him to speak, and as far as he was able benefit the congregation which had come to hear him.

He took for his text a truly beautiful passage of Scripture, one from which hundreds of sermons have been preached.

"Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

The sermon he preached was undoubtedly a powerful one. Evidently the preacher *felt* the words he spoke: his great dark eye lit up with a beautiful light, and every feature of his face expressed the intensity of his feelings, and as his clear, powerful voice rang through the chapel, the people's attention was caught and they listened with breathless interest to every word he said, from the beginning to the end. Young men sat and gazed on him, and as they did so they caught the intensity of the preacher's feelings, and determined by God's help to live better lives; young women felt how vain were many of the things in which they revelled, and longed for something higher. Even Margaret Ashton could not for some time find anything with which she could find fault, and in spite of herself, realised that there was something real, something powerful in Easterbrook's words. Towards the end of the sermon, however, a frown settled upon her forehead, which presently relaxed, and a triumphant smile played over her face. Evidently she heard something which did not agree with her ideas, and which seemed to mullify the impression made by the former part of the sermon. Still she could not help admiring Easterbrook. There was nothing weak about the man, nothing womanly. As he became lost in his subject, he likewise lost his awkwardness, and she acknowledged to herself that he was a noble-looking young fellow as he stood alone on the rostrum, and proclaimed what he believed to be righteous and true

And yet she felt a dislike for him. She would not at first acknowledge this to herself, but she realised that while she had a strange kind of interest in him, the interest had settled down into a kind of enmity. Perhaps it was because he was so plain-spoken to her. Other young men had fawned on her, and flattered her. She had for years been accustomed to the most servile attentions from gentlemen, while this rustic young Methodist minister, one of a class of people she inwardly despised, in spite of her parents and brother's predilection in their favour, paid her no particular attention, and evidently was not in any way borne down by her superiority, and so she made up her mind that she would that very night show him to the best of her ability, and in the most cutting manner, that his preaching was misleading, illogical, and untrue.

Unlike her usual custom when attending chapel, she stayed to the prayer-meeting, and as she heard the young minister earnestly pleading with the people to leave their life of sin, and to be noble and true, she almost decided to refrain from openly criticising him; but after they had left the chapel, the old satirical feeling came back, and she felt more than ever inclined to try and say cutting things to our hero.

Without exception, all the rest who had been to the chapel felt greatly benefitted. Not that anything had been said, but what they had heard many times before, but all seemed to realise that there was an unseen power behind the words; and when during the prayer-meeting several attested to their desire to live Christian lives in the future, the Church knew that the Lord was in His Temple.

It may be there are some who will smile as they read these words; but I thank God with all my heart for Methodist prayer-meetings and Methodist revivals. It is true that there may have been much that is unreal, and unstable in connection with them, but I know of no more beautiful

sight, than that of a man, woman, or child, who, touched by the spirit of God, determines by His help to live righteously and truly. I say this because I know, in spite of the sneers of many, that hundreds of thousands have thus been blessed. Blasphemers, liars, thieves, drunkards, have been led to our houses of prayer, and by what some call "Methodist rant," but what I believe has been the power of the Spirit of God, their lives have been changed. Their blasphemies have been changed to hymns of praise, instead of being liars they have spoken words of truth; instead of being dishonest they have been righteous and just, and instead of being drunkards, they have been sober. Let those then who sneer at Methodist revivals, and laugh at the amount of unhealthy excitement which there often exists, think of this, and overlook eccentricities, and perhaps emptiness, and meaningless noise, because of the real good that has been done.

Even Margaret, cold and cynical as was her nature, could not help feeling glad that some whom she knew were anything but good, decided to try by Christ's help to live pure lives.

When the service was over and Jabez went into the minister's vestry, he found a large number of the leading members of the church awaiting him. They were a medley indeed. Some were well educated and intelligent, and others were just the reverse.

"Weel, lad," said one, "thou'st done thee day's work, and a gooid one, too."

"Ay, Measther Easterbrook, thou'.t done varry weel," said another, "but see tha dos'na git ower proud wi't all. Mony a gooid young man hev been wricked wi' conceit."

Jabez thanked them with a smile, although he felt rather hurt at the last remark.

Then John Dixon came up to him, and like a patriarch blessing his son, laid his hand on the young minister.

"We've enjoyed the service, lad," he said; "thou'st

preached the Gospel earnestly, but happen as thee gits a bit owder thou'lt git tired o' praichin' that kind o' sermon. I've lived a bit longer nor thee, and while thou wert right int' main body o' the discourse, there wur things that thou wouldn't say when tha gits an owd man. Eh, lad, the mercy o' God is limitless, but there's sich a thing as law. I'm noan mich of a scholar, but I've kep my een abroad, and I've seen what thou wilt see. Never mind, thou'st done varry weel, and with a bit o' mendin' here and theere thou'lt do all right; doant forgit what I said at the meetin' Doant grow out of thee faather's cloas."

Here Mr. Ashton claimed Jabez, as he said he must want some rest by this time, and he didn't believe in killing him right away.

They walked home in silence, Jabez, Mr. Ashton, and Reginald; Mrs. Ashton and Margaret had walked on by themselves, and Easterbrook was not sorry when he found himself some minutes later seated by Mr. Ashton's supper-table, although he felt slightly uncomfortable, for Margaret sat opposite him, and he felt sure that her eyes rested scrutinisingly on him.

CHAPTER V.

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

Jabez Easterbrook was well pleased with his day's work. As he reviewed the day and thought of his actions, and the motives he had in performing them, and, moreover, when he considered the amount of apparent success which attended his labours, he thought he had cause to feel comfortable. He had thoroughly enjoyed the service that evening, and he knew from the marked attention of the congregation, that he had not been speaking in vain; while the fact that several of the congregation, some of whom were notorious for sin, had openly declared their intention to live a pure life in the future, had gladdened his heart more than words can say. Hence we may imagine that he stood on a very lofty pedestal, a fall from which would hurt him sorely.

For some time, too, the conversation was of a nature to strengthen his present feeling. Both Mr. and Mrs. Ashton spoke of the true spiritual tone which characterized the meeting, and of the good they thought it must do. Reginald, too, joined in the conversation, and said he trusted that the service of that evening was indicative of the future, and that Mr. Easterbrook's ministry might be greatly blessed to the people.

Then Margaret spoke.

"I can conceive," she said, "of no more responsible position than that of a minister, especially if he has to

minister to ignorant people. What he says is naturally believed, and it is a principle of life that our beliefs govern our actions; thus it is, that if a minister preaches false doctrines, he may do an incalculable amount of harm."

"I think you are right, Miss Ashton," said Jabez, "and I realise more and more clearly each day, how careful I ought to be in seeking out the truth."

"What a pity then," she said, "that you were not more careful in your sermon to-night."

Had a shell exploded at the young minister's feet he could not have been more astonished. He had been so pleased with his labours, so satisfied that he had spoken only the truth, that this quiet, yet cutting remark of Margaret's, rendered him speechless.

"Margaret!" exclaimed Mr. Ashton in surprise, "do you know what you are saying?"

"Perfectly well," she replied coolly. "I said what a pity it was that Mr. Easterbrook had not been more careful in his preaching to-night."

"Why, with what part of it do you find fault?" asked Reginald.

"I could not tell you the *part*," she replied; "I think the whole tendency of the sermon was to grant a premium on sin."

Poor Jabez! his feelings were by no means enviable as he heard these words. He was very sensitive, and he was afraid that somehow he had given expression to some great heresy. At the same time, however, he felt sure that Margaret had determined to find fault with him, and a feeling of anger crept into his heart, and had it been one of his own sex who had made the charge, he would have warmly resented what he felt to be an insult.

"Perhaps Miss Ashton will point out the teaching which grants a premium on sin," he said, stiffly.

"Certainly," replied Margaret. "One point is this.

You were speaking on the term 'abundantly pardon,' and you told us that if we came at the close of our lives to God, with long years of sin behind us, the atonement of Christ would make us as though we had never sinned at all; that the remembrance of the sin should be taken away, and the consequences of sin should be taken away. Is not that so?"

"You are right, I did say so, and I believe it. Will you tell me what is wrong in it?"

"This is wrong in it. The consequences of sin can never be taken away. The words of St. Paul express a law which is unalterable, for 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.'"

"Yes, but the death of Christ paid the debt of sin."

"Will you tell us what you mean by Christ paying the debt of sin, Mr. Easterbrook?"

"I mean this. The natural outcome of sin is punishment, but Christ by His death bore the sins of the world; hence those who believe in Him as their Saviour escape the punishment through their belief."

"Is that the teaching of John Wesley?"

"I think so."

"And do you really believe it?"

"Certainly, or I should not teach it."

"Mr. Easterbrook, you remember that old, white-haired man, who is called John Dixon?"

"I remember him well."

"If I have been informed aright, he has lived a pure, good life ever since he was a child. He is certainly one of the best men I ever knew, true and honest as the day."

"I can quite believe it," replied Jabez, mentally picturing the old man, as he had seen him not long before.

"Well," continued Margaret, "there is another man in the village about the same age as he, and he is, I suppose, the worst man in the whole neighbourhood. According to report, he has been guilty of nearly everything that is bad,

and has been for many years almost a terror to the people. Perhaps you have known such men?"

"Yes, I am sorry to say I have," replied Jabez, at the same time wondering why Margaret talked in this unaccountable way.

"Now," said Margaret, "supposing Ned Crowle, which is the name of this bad, old fellow, were to get converted, do you mean to say he would stand on the same spiritual level, enjoy the same pleasures, and in the same degree feel the spiritual influences as good old John Dixon would?"

"No, certainly not, Miss Ashton."

"Why?"

"Because Dixon, during the years of his life, has been climbing upward, ever becoming more susceptible to high influences, while Crowle has been destroying his finer feelings."

"But why would Crowle be ignorant, coarse-fibred, and comparatively degraded, even though he became converted?"

"Because of the evil life, because of his past sins."

"But, Mr. Easterbrook, you told us that Christ paid the debt of the world's sin, you told us about an abundant pardon, of the sins of our life being swept behind us, and never remembered against us any more."

Poor Jabez! He fidgetted in his chair, and rubbed his hands nervously. He blushed a fiery red, and stammered some incoherent reply, but the tables were turned so completely upon him, that he could not see a loophole of escape anywhere.

"I think you have mistaken my meaning," he said at last.

"I hope I have," replied Margaret, "for such teaching has a tendency to do incalculable harm."

"What I meant was, that although a man may be converted, even at the eleventh hour, he will be safe from hell."

"What is hell in your idea, Mr. Easterbrook?"

"It is a place of punishment for sin."

"Just so. Well, supposing Ned Crowle were converted, and went to Heaven, do you think he would enjoy the same joy, the same peace, as that enjoyed by John Dixon?"

"No, Miss Ashton, I said just now that the sins of his life would so deaden his spiritual sensibilities, as to render it impossible."

"Then sin would be punished even in Heaven."

"I think you are confusing between arbitrary and natural punishment."

"Oh, then, I must understand that God will punish men in an arbitrary way in the future?"

Jabez was sadly confused. He had never thought about this. As I have before stated, his ministerial training had been nearly confined to the reading of theology, with a knowledge of the languages necessary to its study. This had cramped his views, indeed, had cramped his whole thinking powers, and so when he saw his favourite theme in theology driven to its logical issue he was staggered, and so answered almost unthinkingly,

"Certainly, I think there will be arbitrary punishment in the future."

"Might I ask why you think there will be arbitrary punishment? Is there any proof of it?"

"I—I think so—yes."

"Will you tell me where?"

His mind was confused, he could not think of an answer, and for a minute he remained silent.

"Because," continued Margaret, "as far as I can see, Nature is its own avenger. Break Nature's laws, physical, mental, or moral, and as an outcome of those broken laws there is suffering. I see nothing arbitrary, everything is natural, a result of law or of broken law. And I would like to know why you think there is a different kind of punishment in the future to what we have here."

During this controversy, Mr. and Mrs. Ashton were

silent; indeed, they were almost too interested to speak It was seldom that Margaret ever spoke on such matters, and they were glad that she took such an interest in the young minister's sermon, as to speak as she did. Once Mr. Ashton was on the point of checking her when he saw that Easterbrook seemed to be getting the worst of the argument, but he thought that such a proceeding would indicate that he thought the young minister could not maintain his ground, and so he let the conversation proceed. As for Reginald, he thoroughly enjoyed it, and although he thought Jabez was faring badly just then, he thought he would be able to gain a better footing in time.

I have intimated that the young minister was honest to the heart's core, that he was one who hated what was false, thus it was that he would not try to maintain a position when he felt he had no ground on which to stand. Had he been in a more collected state of mind, he might have detected fallacies in Margaret's reasoning; but as it was, he felt he had indeed been preaching heretical notions. For the time, what Margaret had tried to prove wrong, became magnified, until he felt that the whole discourse had a bad tendency instead of a good one. "You are right, Miss Ashton," he said, after musing awhile. "I fear I have been misleading the people. I must ponder over this matter, and as occasion occurs, do all that I can to set it right."

Margaret's eyes flashed triumphantly. She had defeated her opponent, and he had humbly submitted. She was not satisfied, however, and having placed her foot upon this vantage ground she determined to drive him farther.

"Then you agree that it is a matter of law," she said, "that where there is sin there is punishment, and that every man must bear the full penalty of his wrong doing?"

Jabez almost unconsciously nodded his head in assent.

"Then," she said, "wherein is the good or the efficacy of Christ's atonement? Sin is punished just the same as if

Christ had never lived, hence there is no efficacy in His death. Indeed, on your own admission, sin is never forgiven at all. Well then, this being so, where is your sermon of to-night, where is your atonement for sin, indeed, where is the whole fabric of religion?"

While Margaret was speaking thus, Easterbrook was nervously rubbing his hands, while his eyes burned with a bright light, and no sooner had she finished than he stood up, his whole frame trembling with emotion.

"Miss Ashton," he said, "I will admit you have attacked a position which I have not thoroughly thought about, and hence I am afraid I have made admissions which I should not have done. At anyrate, by your mode of reasoning you have made my teaching appear ridiculous. Well, I may have only stated one side of the truth, and when it only appeals to the brain it appears absurd, but I *know* there is forgiveness for sin, I know, because I have felt it. There may be a way in which sin must necessarily be punished, but there is, anomalous as it may seem, forgiveness for sin, and a sense of forgiveness, which gives a joy beyond words. I would not for one moment lessen the heinousness of sin; but I know that there is a power in Christ to save us from it, and the more I believe in Christ, the more power I have over sin, and the more joy in my heart. You ask me, Miss Ashton, where is the whole fabric of religion, because, by my crude expressions, I have made it look meaningless. The fabric of religion is in the hearts and lives of men who are blessed by it. You infer that the mission of Christ was useless. No! It is the sustaining power of every good and noble life. You mentioned the goodness of John Dixon, how is he good and what power helps him? Take away Christ, take away His religion, eradicate His teaching, ay, the teaching of the forgiveness of sins, and what would the world be, what would life be, and where would be our peace, our hope, our joy?"

He spoke quietly, slowly, distinctly, and yet there was a touch of deep passion in his tone, and his voice trembled audibly. His angularity disappeared, and his awkwardness was gone, and as Margaret looked at him she felt awed. There was a something undefinable but real, which enveloped him, something that gave his presence force; an inborn nobleness, and an acquired power through the pure simplicity of his life, that staggered her. She felt that there was the power of a strong man behind his words, and notwithstanding that from a purely argumentative point of view she had come off victorious, she knew she had met her master, and although it caused a feeling of bitterness in her heart, she could not but confess it.

Here Mrs. Ashton spoke. She had been listening to the conversation, but had scarcely understood it, neither had she caught the import and tendency of what Margaret had said. She understood Easterbrook's last remarks, however, and in a quiet, motherly way she corroborated what he had said. Unknowingly, her words fell like oil on troubled waters, and brought them all back to a kind of rest. Undesignedly she spoke of her early life and belief, and the thoughts she used to have, and how different she found religion to be in theory and in experience. After this, the conversation became general, and they soon retired for the night.

When Jabez reached his room he sat down to think. He had been strangely moved during their conversation, the more so because it had seemed so unusual. His experience had not been great, but he had never known of any young lady who had treated any gentleman as Margaret Ashton had treated him. He wondered why she was so sarcastic, so caustic, and why she seemed to be always seeking pitfalls for him. He could not help admiring her, for he felt she was a creature to be admired; her beautiful person and keen intellect demanded it, and yet there was something in

ner that repelled while it fascinated. There was a strange power about her. He had never seen her until the evening previous, and yet he felt he had known her for years, and he wondered why it was so. Then he began to ponder over their conversation. Evidently he had come among people that were terribly heterodox, and who had given up much of what he had been taught to believe. This caused him great pain. He had determined to stick to the old doctrines, for he did not believe they could be amended. True, he had made concessions to Margaret while arguing with her, yet in the quiet of his room he felt sorry for it. It was not for him to trouble about objections, but to preach the Gospel. John Wesley had found it sufficient, and why could not he? He was a Methodist, and he would preach the doctrines whether they agreed with subtle reasonings or no. The Bible taught the doctrines he had preached, or at any rate he had been led to believe so, and he must be content. Watson and others had studied these matters many years ago, the denomination had accepted their teachings, and he would be true whatever might be the consequence. These questions were probably of the devil, and if he troubled about them, might lead him out of the true way.

"No, no," he concluded as he lay down to sleep, "I'll walk in the old lines, and not trouble about what objectors may say to me."

When Margaret reached her room, she was in a state of mind difficult to describe. This awkward stranger interested her more than ever. She had tried to dislike him, indeed she had disliked him, and yet she felt there was something about him that quelled the feeling. She knew she had the best of the argument with regard to the teaching of the sermon, and yet when he stood up and spoke in the way he did, all she had said seemed to shrivel up into mere nothingness.

"What is there about him," she asked herself, "that he should be so different to others? True, he does not fawn and flatter; but that only makes me feel angry with him much as I hate the hollowness of sentimental compliments which I so often hear. He is fairly clever, I should think; but then he is as narrow as a line, he has never lived outside John Wesley's groove, and certainly does not equal many others I have known, and yet he has a something about him which they have not."

She got up from the chair in which she had been sitting, and stood in front of a looking-glass, and saw the reflection of her fine face.

"I am often told I am handsome," she mused, "and that Dick Rider who wanted me to marry him told Reginald that he never yet knew the man, whose affections were disengaged, who wouldn't fall in love with me. This clown of a fellow does not seem to think I am better looking than Charlotte the dairymaid, indeed, he speaks far more pleasantly to her than to me. I heard him this afternoon. How coldly he looks on me, while Fred Warren, when I speak to him, is as nervous as an imprisoned bird."

Margaret, by these words, betrayed another trait in her character; she desired power over others, especially over those of the opposite sex, and this led her to compare the two men.

"What a difference there is between them," she thought. "How polished and versed in the rules of society is Warren, while this young fellow apparently never entered any society, and yet there is something about him that I cannot understand. Fred Warren is like a pug dog by the side of a mastiff when compared to this young minister."

Again she studied her face in the glass, and then broke out impetuously—

"But why in the world am I troubling about him? I don't like him, neither do I think he likes me. But what of

that? he's a clown to look at in spite of his height and stature, and I'll make him feel he is one too, before long. I see how sensitive he is, and I'll sting him, for there is something in every word he speaks which makes me wish to snub him."

Soon after she had arrived at this conclusion, Margaret retired for the night, and silence reigned supreme at Heathertown Grange.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAN AND THE DOG.

DURING the next few days Jabez had little or no opportunity for study or pastoral work. It took him some time to get suitable apartments, and having got them, he had his books to unpack and place on their shelves, besides many other matters incumbent on a young minister when entering lodgings; but having settled himself comfortably he started to work in real good earnest. He looked over the circuit plan, and found that as he was often at Heathertown Church, he would have to make over twenty sermons a quarter, and on looking over those he had made while a student, he felt that he could not preach them. Somehow his conversation with Margaret Ashton had set him thinking. Her criticisms and arguments, although unsound, told him that there was something wrong; what, he could not tell, but there was an indefinable something which gave him a distaste for preaching his old sermons.

He recalled the parting words of his old tutor

"My boy," the old man said, "whatever you do, stick to the plain teaching of the Scriptures, never deviate from that. No matter how unpalatable, or unpopular it may be, let that be your authority, and you cannot get wrong. Many of your people will be like those of olden time, constantly wanting 'some new thing,' but be faithful to the teaching of the Bible and you will be safe."

He tested his sermons by what he thought to be the teaching of the Bible, and everything seemed right ; indeed, he had brought passages of Scriptures, given in his *Handbook of Theology*, as proofs of the doctrines he sought to advocate, and yet he felt something was wanting. Unconsciously he would ask himself what Margaret Ashton would say to such and such a line of argument, and with a sigh he would try and think of a new text.

Sometimes, when in this state of mind, he would ask himself whether he was sure he was sound in the faith, and would mentally go through the cardinal doctrines of the Methodist Churches ; and time after time, as he went on from the existence of God, through the arguments for the Scriptures, and through the doctrines, he would say "sound as a bell." In spite of this, however, when he read his sermons on total depravity, imputed righteousness, the reconciliation of God by Christ, and similar subjects, he felt anything but comfortable.

In his visiting, he did not get on as well as he hoped. John Ashton had introduced him to a considerable number of people in the village ; but it grieved him to find that he had great difficulty in keeping clear from gossip.

It seemed to interest the villagers far more to hear what his home was like, and what he used to do and be, than to know about the prosperity of the churches ; while the chief thing the younger portion of the people desired to know was, whether he was engaged.

During the first few weeks he was far from happy. Yorkshire people do not make friends quickly, and somehow or other he did not feel at home in their houses, and it seemed a relief both to him and the people when he left. Then when he went to his lodgings, and sat night after night and day after day with no society but his books, he felt almost homeless and friendless.

He did not care to go to Mr. Ashton's, for Margaret's

sarcasm had taken away all the pleasure which he might have otherwise derived from visiting there, and so he sat lonely in his lodgings, sad and forlorn.

He had met Margaret once or twice in the village, but she had only acknowledged him by a haughty inclination of the head, which did not have a tendency to make him more comfortable.

Thus several weeks passed away, and he had not visited Heathertown Grange; when, one evening, some business in connection with the church necessitating his calling on Mr. Ashton, he wended his way thither. On this evening Margaret was sitting alone, and she was thinking deeply. Two days before Frederick Warren had offered himself and his fortune to her on the condition that she would be his wife, and she was wondering whether she had done right in acting as she had done.

He was regarded as no ordinary match. It was reputed that he had nearly £100,000, and lived in the finest house in the district. He was well educated, or rather he had gone through the course of study by which it is supposed that young men attain a good education, and he was regarded by the young ladies of the district as a "real love of a fellow." And yet, when he asked her to be his wife, she refused to say yes. She felt that he lacked a something she wanted in a husband. His mind, she felt, would be hers, and she knew she could bend him at will, but by some strange inconsistency, much as she liked power, she detested the thought that her husband should be weaker than herself.

He was a very humble wooer, he told her he could not live apart from her, that she was his light and his life, and besought her to give him some word of hope. After much pleading she promised him that he might renew his request at the end of a year, but beyond that she could not go. She would not promise to say yes at the

end of the year, but she would again consider it. She was thinking of this on the night that Jabez had an appointment there. She stood at the drawing-room window and watched him as he opened the gate and came up the carriage-drive, and then a look of annoyance passed over her face, as she saw Warren come up behind him.

The evening was sultry, and the window was slightly opened; thus, concealed by the Venetian blinds, she could see the two young men and hear what they might say.

They came slowly up the drive together, and when near the house, stood on the lawn, while Warren explained to Jabez the admirable qualities of a mare he possessed.

"Can you ride well, Mr. Easterbrook?" he asked.

"Only fairly, I am afraid," replied Jabez; "most of our horses were farm horses, indeed we only kept one as a kind of hack, so I can't claim the honour of being a good horseman."

"Oh, then, I am afraid you couldn't ride my mare, for she is very high spirited, and even the trainers were for a time afraid to back her."

"Were you afraid as well?" asked Jabez.

"I afraid! no, my dear fellow; not of anything in that line. I backed her and rode her before any man among them. I can assure you I am not easily frightened."

It happened, however, at this time, that his vaunted courage was destined to be put to the test. By some means or other the large watch dog, Carlo, had broken the chain by which he had been fastened to the kennel, and hearing the sound of strange voices, he came rushing up to the spot where they stood. Carlo was by no means a savage dog naturally, but being nearly always chained, was somewhat dangerous if he should happen to be at liberty. He was not a handsome dog, for he had a terribly ferocious aspect, and his breed was a kind of mixture of a Newfoundland and a mastiff.

No sooner did Frederick Warren see him, however, than he uttered a cry, half of fear, and half of anger.

"Get back, you brute," he cried; "get back."

This, however, did not in the least incline Carlo to withdraw. Had he spoken kindly, possibly the dog might have let them go about their business, but the sound of a fearful yet angry voice, and the sight of the young man whirling a large stick above his head, aroused the latent ferocity of his nature, and he sprang angrily towards Warren with a savage growl, showing as he did so two terrible-looking rows of teeth.

"Call him off! Call him off!" shouted Warren, trembling with fear.

Jabez spoke kindly to the dog, but it had no effect. He lay crouched not far from where they stood with his eyes fixed on the young heir, as if preparing for a spring.

Margaret stood at the window all this time watching the two young men, and although she knew the nature of the dog she did not attempt to call him away. She knew that a word from her would make him as gentle as a lamb, but she did not seem to care to speak it. With a smile of contempt on her face, she saw how Carlo had frightened her would-be lover, and she wished that the young minister were the object of the dog's anger instead of Warren, as she wanted to see how he would behave. In spite of this, however, Jabez was left unmolested, and notwithstanding the cries of the other, the eyes of the dog became more savage looking, as he crept nearer and nearer to them.

To watch the young man's face during this time was indeed to see a curious spectacle. Drops of perspiration stood thick on his forehead, his eyes seemed to start out of their sockets, his mouth twitched nervously, while his face was livid with passion and fear.

Still the dog crouched and growled, and watched.

"Look here, Mr. Warren," said Jabez, "don't move, and I'll get around behind and grasp his collar."

"Don't—do-on't go away, my dear fellow," gasped Warren.

"I'm not; I only want to lay hold of the brute, and hold him until someone comes to tie him up."

Jabez suited his action to his words, and crept around behind to get an opportunity of seizing him. No sooner, however, did the dog see this, than he turned quickly away from Warren, and with passion renewed prepared to attack our hero. No sooner did Warren see this, than he took to his heels and ran with all his might towards a summer-house, leaving the young minister alone.

Again a scornful look passed over Margaret's face, and again she looked with eager attention towards the lawn, where the dog more infuriated than ever snarled savagely. It was scarcely a sight to interest a young lady of education and refined feelings, and yet she seemed wonderfully interested in the impending contest between the dog and the man. She saw that Jabez's face became slightly pale, but no sound escaped him; he simply fixed his eyes on the animal's face, until it seemed to become fascinated. She noticed, too, that no sooner had he done so, than the dog's savage growl changed into a kind of moaning sound; and he seemed afraid.

She watched like one fascinated herself, as the young minister stood still and gazed steadily into the brute's eyes. Presently she saw him move slowly forward, while Carlo crept back, and the low moan changed into a whine; then she heard the young man talk to the dog as though he understood him.

"Do you think, you brute," she heard him say, "that I am afraid of you? Do you think I mind your ugly eyes, or your sharp teeth? Do you know I could now kick you in the mouth, and break your nasty jaw? You know I could."

This was uttered in a steady, incisive tone, while his eyes

were still fixed on the eyes of the dog, and Margaret saw how he trembled as Jabez uttered these words.

Then she heard him speak again; but in a changed tone.

"Get back to your kennel," he said, pointing towards the back-yard. Without waiting, the dog did as it was told. Instinctively it realised that it had found its master. The savage nature of the dog was quelled by the strong will and fearless nature of the man, and with a whine it ran away with its tail tucked between its legs.

It would be difficult to describe Margaret's feelings when she knew that the young minister had won the victory. She had seen the man whom she had thought about as her husband, cowed and frightened, while Jabez stood there a conqueror by sheer force of will-power. There was nothing awkward about him now. His manly form gave evidence of power and force which no badly-fitting clothes could take away, and she could not but feel it. Still she watched and listened.

"Mr. Warren," she heard him say, "where are you? The brute is gone now, so you will be left unmolested."

Then she saw the young heir come out of the summer-house to which he had run, and fearfully come towards him.

"You are sure he's gone, Mr. Easterbrook?" he said. "He won't come back again, will he?"

"Oh no, I think he's all right now."

"I say, don't say anything about this indoors, will you?" said Warren. "I want to make a strong point with Mr. Ashton about it, for I think he should be ashamed of himself to leave the dog unchained like that."

"Just so; I'll say nothing about it," replied Jabez with a smile.

"Do I look frightened, Mr. Easterbrook? I hope no one in the house saw us. I don't think they did, or they would surely have come out."

The two young men entered the house together. Jabez

was shown into the library, where he transacted his business with Mr. Ashton; while Warren, not seeing Margaret, sat and talked with Mrs. Ashton. Meanwhile that young lady sat in the drawing-room alone, thinking thoughts that were by no means pleasant. She had for a long time been wanting to care for Frederick Warren. Both her father and mother were willing that she should marry him, and sometimes she had thought she could be content to spend her life as his wife. He was rich, generous, kindly disposed, and would place her in a position of power and influence, and yet, now, as she sat alone, her soul abhorred the idea of being doomed to such a fate.

"Why is it," she thought, "that I cannot make up my mind to accept him?"

Then a look of scorn passed over her face, as she thought of the scene in the garden.

"After all," she mused, "after all his position and wealth, he is but a well-dressed puppy, and a cowardly one at that. How frightened he was because Carlo barked at him, and how like a whipped cur he ran away and left Mr. Easterbrook to himself. What a difference there is between them. How Carlo was cowed when he looked at him, and how he sneaked away from him. It must be grand to be strong and defiant like that, and what a conquest it must be to subdue such a man. Conquer him! After all, what is he? Only a Methodist minister, living on a pittance that some of the mill-hands would refuse to work for. He's only a great, awkward, bigoted fellow, and yet he's a *man*. How he appears to dislike me, how coolly he passes me, and how haughtily he raises his hat, as though he were my superior. I believe I do admire him, and yet I positively dislike him, for somehow I am afraid of him. I wish Carlo had bitten him, and he had run away like Warren did. No, I don't though, for—for—after all what am I thinking about?"

Here her brother Reginald came and asked her to come

into the room where the rest were seated, so that they might have some music.

"And, by-the-way," continued Reginald, after he had delivered the message, "Fred Warren and Easterbrook are in the sitting-room, so you are right for a good banter."

"I don't feel in the humour for bantering, Reg," replied Margaret.

"No? Well, although I must confess those passages in arms between you and Easterbrook were enjoyable, yet I don't think them quite fair, for, although he is a bit narrow, he's a downright good fellow, and in spite of everything he is laying hold of the affections of the people."

"Oh, it's not that I can assure you. I have no tender feelings towards him, none in the least. Indeed, in spite of all your praise and seeming liking, I thoroughly detest him, for such a bundle of stupidity and awkwardness I never saw before."

"Nay, Margaret, that's not fair; but come along, they are waiting for us."

For the next half-hour Jabez sat almost entranced while Margaret sang. She had a rich contralto voice, and she sang some songs suitable to it, in a way which Jabez had never dreamed of, and in spite of the fact that she had said she held him in detestation, she could not help feeling gratified at his hearty and sincere applause.

"How many times I have wished I could play," he said; "but, somehow or other, when I was a lad my performances called forth so little sympathy that I gave up in despair, and now I would give a great deal to be able to sit down when tired and wearied and play something from Mozart or Handel."

"If I were you I would not fret," replied Margaret; "it is only a feminine accomplishment properly. If I were a man I would never trouble about such matters, but care more about doing deeds of daring. I would like to ride a horse

that no one else would dare to ride, and face dangers which would frighten other people."

"Even if you were to do that," replied Jabez, "you would be glad of some music at times, for surely our natures demand it."

"No," she said, "I am tired of the vapid sentimentality of the young men of the present time, and young women, too, for that matter. The greatest achievement among our modern knights is to knock a croquet ball through a hoop, or to send a ball over a tennis-net in such a way as to make it difficult for any one to return it. And after the game is over to sit beneath a laburnum tree or some such poetical place, and talk silly poetry to their fair partners, who are about as romantic as themselves; and perhaps by way of variation make and smoke cigarettes."

"Nay, nay, Margaret," cried Reginald, "don't be so hard on us;" but still he laughed aloud with the rest, who, with the exception of Warren, seemed to enjoy her harangue.

"I am afraid," said Mr. Ashton, "that Margaret has been reading some of our popular novel writers, or she would not read the life of our young men so unfairly."

"You know, father," she replied, "that I never read light novels, neither do I think I am unfair. I see but little of the bravery which characterised the young men of olden time. We talk about our civilisation and education, but it seems to have done little but make men, weak women, and our women, dolls. I would not deprecate education; but the education and the customs which take away the power which won for our nation its ancient glory are surely not good for us."

"But, my dear," interposed Mrs. Ashton, "what was the ancient glory of which you have been speaking? It was only fighting and killing. I am thankful I live in peaceable times," and the old lady patted her hands with a sigh of content.

"Better have bravery even though there be a little cruelty with it, than have the effeminate puppyism we see around us now. Where do we find the chivalry of ancient times? Back in the days of Robin Hood men *were* men, strong and brave, preferring death to defeat."

Margaret had by this time risen from the music-stool and stood at the end of the piano, presenting as she did so a striking picture. Her finely-moulded figure seemed to quiver with animation, while her great, dark eyes flashed brightly, and every feature of her face indicated the intensity of her feelings.

"Back in the days of Robin Hood," said Reginald, "in spite of the halo of romance that has been thrown around them, men were little better than savages, unmerciful and unfeeling."

"At least they were strong and brave. Ivanhoe, according to Sir Walter Scott, had a very slender education, but was the soul of honour. Better be even Bois Guilbert, with his dark, stern, but strong and brave nature, than be the effeminate and cowardly creatures young men are to-day; the staple conversation among the best and most sedate of them is some sentimental novel, or the latest thing in neckties."

"I must protest against this," laughed Jabez; "neither will I wear your cap—for it does not suit me. I care very little about sentimental novels, and not a straw for the latest thing in neckties."

"And I will fight against the accusation that young men are cowardly," laughed Reginald. "I believe we are as brave to-day as ever they were in the so-called days of chivalry and daring."

"Then I should like to see such bravery among our society men," said Margaret. "Bravery! daring! Why, if a pug dog or even a lady's lap dog bark at them, they run away like whipped curs in order to escape the supposed dangers.'

Poor Warren, how he turned and twisted at this sally. It was an awful question to him whether Margaret had seen his encounter with Carlo, and if so, what she thought of him. Was this conversation an attack on him? He had tried to enter into the conversation but could not, and now this last speech of Margaret's had cut him like a sword.

"But, Margaret," said Mr. Ashton, "physical courage is not all. The moral courage which will enable a man to be true under the most trying circumstances is a far grander thing than to cut one's way through an army of men, although glory may be obtained thereby. What moral courage was there in the olden days?"

"The moral courage of Thomas à Beckett, aye, even of Peter the Hermit, that old man, whom the world to-day calls mad, had at any rate the courage of his convictions, and because of it he moved Christendom."

"Admitting that, are we destitute of moral courage to-day?"

"Ask rather, are we not? How very few there are who have the courage to think. Men live with the dead hand of the past upon them, and look into the grave of the buried dead for their teaching, and will not go outside that for fear they shall offend officials, committees, and influential individuals. Men in these modern days rest upon personal authority, even although that authority may have lived hundreds of years ago, rather than be true to the inspiration of to-day."

Jabez felt this to be a thrust at him; and more than this, he felt himself guilty of the charge, still he thought he would like to know a little more clearly what she meant, and so he asked her to explain herself.

"Why," she replied, "have not the religious teachers of the last fifty years even discarded all modern discovery? Have they not preferred to interpret the Bible by the inch rule of bigotry rather than accept facts in geology and

evolution by which they might more truly interpret it? Have they not largely shut their eyes to what scientists have taught with regard to nature and life, because it has not accorded with their own creeds? Have not men like John Stuart Mill been scouted, outlawed, and branded as enemies to the truth, because they could not pin their faith to the creed of the priests?"

"And what would you have?"

"Have? I would like to see our teachers search out truths and principles without consulting their text-books. I would like to hear preachers who would preach the truth without caring what the world might say, and seek only to lead the world to a higher faith, and hence to a higher life. I would like to see bravery and daring in this way, so that we might have at least the spirit of past ages, although we might not have the same laws and customs."

"Come, come," said Mrs. Ashton, who had not understood much of the purport of their talk, and who wanted it to end, "let us have that beautiful song of Mrs. Hemans'. Come, Margaret, sing us 'The Better Land.'"

Again Jabez was entranced by Margaret's singing, and the tones of the song rang in his ears many days afterwards, as he thought about the young lady who was so different from any one he had ever met.

CHAPTER VII.

MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY.

AUGUST and September had gone, and October with its chilling winds had come, blowing the shrivelled leaves into shivering heaps, and making brown the meadows which not long before had been of a beautiful green.

Jabez had been to a missionary meeting at a village some distance from Heathertown, and was slowly returning There was a rugged beauty in the scene around him. The green had departed from hill and dale, from sturdy oak and from willow bush; but the brown which had taken its place was by no means destitute of charm, and the young minister often stopped on his homeward way to look at the strange effect which the bright moon made as it shone through the half-naked branches of the trees and cast weird shadows on the ground.

It is undoubtedly a fact that if people have a love for nature, however small it may be, a moonlit evening will have a great effect on them. It will have a tendency to lead them away from things in themselves material, and make them long for that which is spiritual. Montaigne has said in one of his essays, that "to study philosophy is to learn to die," and that statement will, I think, appeal to a student of philosophy. So a moonlit night leads us away from the world of reality to a world of fancy, that is, providing our natures are susceptible to poetic scenes. Jabez had a somewhat

poetical soul He could read poetry, and one writer has said that the man who could read poetry is himself a poet, so in this sense Jabez was a poet. He had been strangely interested while walking home in watching the moon's rays, and in listening to the low moan of the nightwinds as it sobbed its way down the valley. Thousands of fancies concerning life and death flashed through his mind, thoughts about a purely spiritual world floated in his brain, until he was almost taken away from this life with all its hard struggles and battles.

His bright yet shadowy fancies were, however, doomed to receive a shock, for on turning a corner in the lane he found a lot of rough men persecuting a poor half-idiot girl. They did not mean the poor creature much harm, and Molly Lark was regarded as fair sport by the youths and maidens of the village; but Jabez, impressed as he had been by the moonlit scene, was roused into a feeling amounting nearly to a passion by the cries and entreaties of the half-demented creature.

He laid hold of a youth who was pretending to make love to Molly, and with no very gentle hand sent him staggering back towards the fence.

"How dare you insult the poor creature?" he cried.

"What dost a say?" asked the young fellow, who had fallen against the fence in such a way as to make him feel very uncomfortable.

"Why did you treat the poor half-dazed girl in such a way?" asked Jabez, indignantly.

"To make a fooil spaik," replied the youth, "and it happened to coom yar turn furst."

At this there was a loud guffaw on the part of the men, and words of approval fell from their lips.

"A gooid hit," said one.

"'Appen he'll think afore he spaiks to a chap as is goin' a coortin' the nicest lass in t' village," said another.

"And who might ye be?" asked a third.

"You know very well who I am," replied Jabez, "and if you don't you can look and see."

"By golly! it's t' new passon," said one.

"Well, and what if 'tis?" said another; "he's noan comin' amo'a Yorkshire foak to crow ovver them."

At this the youth who had felt something of the strength of Jabez's arm spoke again.

"And so thou'rt t' new passon? Well, I want a bit of talk with tha, lad."

"Very well," said Jabez, scarcely knowing what reply to make.

"Dost a know what they call me?" he asked. "May be ye do'ant, for I hev' nothin' to do with white-livered passons, so I'll tell tha. My reight name is Ned Stickfield; but they call me Ned Bruiser; 'appen ye can think what for. I wur twenty-two last June, and I'm nearly thirteen stoan weight."

"Well, what of that?"

"I'll tell thee directly, passon. I can drink a gallon o' beer and noan be tight, and I can feight ony man in t' village but one, and that's Jack Brag; but he's noan here now, so I'm boss o' t' shanty."

"Indeed; well, what then?"

"Why, this. If I like to kiss a lass, if shoo's as silly as a cuckoo, and as ugly as Molly Lark's mother, it's noan thy business. Thou'st skinned my left knuckle on yon fence, and now to mak a pair I'll skin my right knuckle on thy nose, or tha'st have to show feight."

Jabez was silent, as indeed were all the rest, who had become vastly interested in the issue of things.

"Wust a feight?" continued the youth, looking up into Jabez's face.

"Certainly not!"

"Nay thee wunna feight, tha'art too grit a coward for

hot. Coom, I'll mak thee feight," and he gave Jabez a stinging blow with his open hand.

The young minister's blood began to get warm, but he put a check on his feelings, and then he spoke again.

"You were ill-treating this poor idiot girl," he said, "and big as you are, and bully as you seem to be, you are only a coward. I did not mean to hurt your hand, but I could not pass by and let the poor thing be insulted."

"Coward am I!" was the reply. "Hevn't I offered to feight? Con a chap spaik t' fairer than thot? Coom now, wilt a feight?"

"I say again, certainly not."

There is a something in the rugged Yorkshireman, fallen low as he may be, which will not allow him to pummel an unresisting man. Ned Stickfield was one of the terrors of the village, and promised to be a confirmed sot by the time he was forty, but dearly as he loved beating a man, he felt it cowardly to strike one who would not strike him again. So for a minute the youth stood speechless, not knowing what to do, while the rest waited excitedly for what might follow next.

Meanwhile, the poor idiot girl had stood open-mouthed, staring at the scene. She had been sorely frightened by them, and trembled violently, yet she remained, fascinated by the conversation, and wondered what would be done.

Presently "The Bruiser" spoke again.

"Well," he said, "seenin' thou wunna feight, I am naan to give Molly a kiss, and then tak her whoam."

At these words the poor creature gave a wild, fearful scream, like the scream of a wild beast, and tried to run away, but before she could do so Stickfield caught her by the arm and tried to put his arm around her neck.

"Oa! let me be!" screamed the poor creature, but her persecutor dragged her away from the group up the lane.

"Let her go!" roared Jabez.

"I shall do nowt o' t' soort," replied Stickfield.

"I shall make you if you don't," cried Jabez

"I'd like to see thee try," sneered the other.

"Let me be!" Molly continued to scream so piteously that Jabez could not restrain himself. He doubled his brawny fist and sent the poor girl's persecutor to the ground with a heavy thud.

He was up again in a moment and attacked the young minister furiously; but he was in a great passion, and Jabez was cool and collected.

Time after time did the village bully try to strike down our hero, but time after time he failed; every blow he gave was parried, every stratagem was defeated.

"So ye con feight, if ye be a passon," exclaimed the astonished youth, while the rest uttered exclamations of surprise.

Jabez did not strike back, he simply parried the blows. Years before he belonged to a Mechanics' Institute, and there he learnt the art of boxing, while wrestling was a general and common accomplishment among the boys at his home.

By-and-bye Stickfield got tired of striking without effect, and so he determined to get at closer quarters. He seized the young minister by the coat, but being ignorant of the tricks of wrestling, he found himself on his back on the hard road, through a manœuvre called by wrestlers "the flying mare."

For some minutes he was unable to move, and the rest of the company were vowing the direst vengeance on Jabez, when a big burly form appeared.

"What's t' row here?" cried Jack Brag, for he was the new comer.

"T' new passon hev pawsed Ned Bruiser and nearly done for him," was the reply.

"What for?" cried Jack.

"'Cause he wur havin' a bit ov fun wi' Molly Lark," was the answer.

Jack strode up to Jabez.

"Let's hear what tha'st gotten to say aba'at it," cried Jack.

In a few words Jabez told him the circumstances of the case, and Jack appeared highly delighted.

"Thou'st done right," said Jack joyfully; "and look ye here," he cried, turning to the rest, "him as touches t' young passon touches me. I'm his friend, d'ye see? and I'll pawse t' man that touches him till he's as soft as a jelly fish."

They all knew what this meant, and the strength of Jack Brag's arm was proverbial. Instead of popular feeling being on the side of Stickfield, now it was turned to that of Jabez, and one fellow more enthusiastic than the rest cried, "Three cheers for t' passon."

"Tell thee," continued Jack, turning to Stickfield, "aw'm reet weel stalled o' thee. I thowt whon I guv thee tha last licken, that I learned tha a lesson, but it seems aw'm mistakken. I do'ant moind a chap gitten a bit over t' bay, but for a lad like thee to go a teasing a puir silly lass loike Molly, is enough to mak a cat spaik. Aw'm reet glad, lad, that thee'st had a licken, and aw'm pra'ad o't t' young passon."

By this time Stickfield had picked himself up, and finding that popular feeling had turned against him he was turning quietly towards the village.

"Mr. Stickfield," said Jabez.

"Aw'm noan mister, aw'm Ned," was the reply.

"I am very sorry," continued the young minister, "that this event has happened. Don't think I bear you any ill-will, I simply wanted to defend this poor girl, and in my indignation I am afraid I acted too hastily and too harshly. Come, let us shake hands."

"What dost a main?" replied the astonished Ned.

"Just what I say," replied Jabez; "come, give us your hand."

It was very strange to Ned that this young minister should treat him in this way. He always had an idea that "passons," as he called them, were proud, soft-fingered, yet cowardly fellows, but this one was not anything like he had conceived. He was not a bad fellow, and had great respect for a man who could give him "his licken" as he termed it. He was susceptible to kindness, and felt somewhat moved by the words Jabez had spoken, but still was altogether taken aback.

"Dost a mean it?" he stammered.

"Of course I do," replied Jabez, "and just to make all things square, let us walk down to Molly's home, and then you can come in and have some supper with me."

"Supper wi' thee?" cried Ned.

"Certainly," said Jabez, "you and Jack together. You know I asked you some time ago," turning to Jack, "but you have not come yet; come to-night."

Ned Stickfield did not understand this, and there was something about it he did not like. He was going back to the village vowing vengeance on him, and now to go home with him to supper was such a change. Was the young stranger afraid of him and using this as a means of making friends? If it were so, he would not go, although he did feel it an honour to be asked with the young minister to his apartment.

"Art a feared aw'm going to lick thee, that th.a'art spaikin' so smooth?" he said.

If Jabez had confirmed this idea of Ned's, his chance of his respect would have been gone for ever, for he only respected those who were not cowards, and those who, to use his own terms, "could pawse hard." Our young friend, too, was a bit annoyed at this interpretation of his conduct, while Jack Brag waited anxiously to hear what he would say. Jabez saw this and answered a little indignantly:

"If you think that, don't come; if I was afraid of you, do you think I would have done as I have? I would scorn to ask a man into my house of whom I was in the slightest degree afraid. Good-night, I'm going to my lodgings, but I'll see that you don't touch this poor idiot girl again."

"Give us yer hond on that," cried Jack Brag; "we will be glad to coom, Measter Easterbrook, and proud too, and soa will Ned Stickfield."

"And give me thee hond too, passon," cried Ned. "Thou art a mon, thou art, and thou'st made me shamed o' mysen."

A few minutes later the three were seated in Jabez's study, and not long after a large quantity of beef-steak was placed on the table which the young minister had ordered for his guests.

Poor fellows, at first they felt sadly uncomfortable. The sitting-room was neat and clean, and well furnished, while they, owing to their dissolute habits, knew nothing about such luxury. Then when Mrs. Smith, Jabez's landlady, placed silver-plated forks on the table, they did not know how to use them; but owing to the kind, genial talk of their host they felt more at ease after a while, and began to talk freely of their life and work. It was at a rather late hour they left for their homes, but there could not be found two men in the whole neighbourhood in better spirits or more proud of the honour which they felt conferred upon them, than did Ned Stickfield and Jack Brag.

Next day the village was in a state of intense excitement. Like wildfire the news, much exaggerated, had flown from house to house of the encounter of the young minister with Ned Stickfield; while at the mills it was the subject of conversation the whole of the day, indeed for several days.

Some older ones, both men and women, held up their hands in apparent dismay. To think, they said, that the young minister should act in such a way was terrible, and he ought to be severely censured; indeed it would be well

if he were suspended for a while. Some even went so far as to say that he should be expelled, and took steps in calling the officials of the circuit together for that purpose. But most of the people, especially the young men, declared that he had done a real plucky thing, and those who had held ministers in scorn, looked with considerable favour "on t' chap that could howd his own wi' Ned Bruiser."

Good old John Dixon said he "thowt nowt less of a chap as t' could feight a bit at t' reet time, and he sud'na thowt mich of him if he'd gone by like a ninny and niver said a word."

This feeling became, after awhile, nearly unanimous, and even the dog-fanciers and pigeon-flyers began to salute Jabez, and mutter after he had gone, that "he wur a nice lad."

Some felt a little bit jealous that he should have invited the two worst characters in the village to his lodgings, but they soon got ashamed of that, and Jabez had never stood higher in the estimation of the people than he did a week after the event we have just narrated.

When Mr. Ashton and Reginald heard of it, they laughed, and said he was a plucky fellow, and a good specimen of muscular Christianity. Margaret, on the contrary, said nothing, but she thought a great deal. She asked herself what Frederick Warren would have done in a similar position, and as she thought, she became more and more out of love with the man who wanted to make her his wife. In spite of this, her feeling of dislike grew stronger towards the young minister; somehow he always made her feel uncomfortable, and presently she ceased from going to chapel when he was preaching, and went to church instead. The vicar, however, did not help her in the way she wanted to be helped. He was a true, high-souled man, and taught her to respect goodness, truth, virtue, and manliness wherever they were to be found, and she, although she could not help admiring Easterbrook, grew more bitter towards him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GIPSY'S TENT.

Several weeks had passed since the episode which we tried to describe in our last chapter, and things had settled down to their normal condition in the village. The young minister had become pretty-well respected by many of the people, although not universally. Perhaps, however, a wrong word has been used. He was respected universally, but he was not an universal favourite. He had determined when he came into the village to be a thorough pastor, and he made arrangements to visit his congregation in regular order; but after a time he came to the conclusion, that in a vast majority of instances it was waste of time. He discovered that among many of the villagers, gossip, to which he had an intense hatred, was the order of the day. Moreover, he did not see the use of visiting strong, healthy men and women who were able to attend all the meetings in connection with the Heathertown Church far more frequently than he himself could. He was not the kind of man to do anything because others have done it. He wanted to see a necessity for anything he took in hand, so he made up his mind to visit only the sick, and the aged, besides an occasional call on those to whom he thought a word might do good. This displeased many of the villagers; they only thought he was working when he was tramping from house to house, not recognising that a minister's hardest work is at his study desk. Still, among

the majority of the people he wielded a great influence, and was regarded as just such a man as they needed. By his sympathy with Jack Brag, and his encounter with Ned Stickfield, he had drawn many of their companions to chapel, and it was a source of great joy to him to see them listening attentively to the earnest words which he spoke.

Some of the young men of the village had come to him for help on difficult questions. Perhaps, however, they had a desire to parade their knowledge, and they somewhat confused him, by attacking various theories which he had been in the habit of teaching. Jabez, however, was very severe with them, he told them they must abide by the plain teaching of their theology, and not be carried away by new notions. Whether he was right or wrong I will not give an opinion, but certain it is they only came once, and afterwards talked very learnedly and very patronisingly about his teaching not being in accordance with the spirit of the age.

There was also a literary society in connection with the church, and he being the minister was made president. Here his narrow training was a great disadvantage. He scouted everything which did not accord with his interpretations of the Scriptures. He had been taught to read God's Word with glasses which had been coloured by Methodist teaching, and he believed that no new light could be brought to bear on it. Hence it was that when young men who had studied chemistry, geology, biology, and other sciences, stated facts on these subjects and tried to draw certain lessons from them concerning the mode by which God created the world, he told them that it was a Christian society, not an infidel debating class. The young men spoke strongly against this insinuation; they were not infidels, they said, but they could not close their eyes to demonstrated truths.

One young man who had gone through a course of study in ancient philosophy wrote a paper on the teaching of

Socrates and Plato; he pointed out the wondrous similarity between their teaching and that of Christ, and while Christ's life and teaching were the consummation of their highest ideals of manhood, yet he claimed that these men were inspired by God, and that although heathen, and had a very vague conception of the God we believe in, they were under Divine influence and guidance.

This came into direct opposition to the theories which Jabez had been taught concerning inspiration, and instead of showing or trying to show wherein the fallacy of such teaching lay, he said that it appeared to be a determined effort to undermine the Divine authority of the Scriptures.

This led to much controversy, which was fast drifting on to invective, and before many weeks had passed away there was a considerable falling off in the attendance at the classes. He found also that some of these young men neglected the House of Prayer on Sundays, while others had made a friend and ally of the curate of the village.

This conduct alarmed the young minister very much; he thought he had been doing the best possible thing in denouncing these young men's thoughts in the way he had done, and when he found that instead of drawing them to him, he had been driving them away, he began seriously to consider his whereabouts.

He pondered over the saying of Christ, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me," and he saw that somehow he must have failed to lift up the Christ, for his influence had been repelling rather than otherwise. Yet, when he thought of Jack Brag, and Ned Stickfield, both of whom he had led to sign the pledge, and both of whom were being led by degrees to a better, purer life; when he saw, Sunday by Sunday, numbers of young fellows come to chapel who, according to report, had absented themselves from a place of worship for years, he rejoiced in the fact that he was doing some good in the village.

But was it not possible that he might benefit both the educated and the uneducated? Why should his influence be confined to the poor and the uncultivated! These were the questions which often appealed to him. He inquired into the life and habits of the curate to whom some of the young men had gone, and he found that he was a great student and a scholar, that he was broad in sympathies, and that he encouraged them in reading works on science and philosophy. He looked at the books which were ranged along his own bookshelves, and he found that they were all old, none bearing on the mental life of the time in which he lived.

"Is not the old Gospel sufficient?" he thought; "am I to run away after modern thought, and science falsely so-called, shall I not be doing right by adhering to the old truths, and discarding all modern foibles?"

Thoughts similar to this were passing through his mind as one afternoon in January he was walking over a breezy common which lay outside the village. It was a raw cold day. The sky was leaden, and the sun was barely ever to be seen through the murky clouds; but still the cold was bracing and healthy, and the hard, frost-crusted soil beneath his feet made him feel like bounding over the heather as he did years ago when returning from school. He had not been out long when he heard merry voices in the near distance, and looking in the direction from whence the sound came, he saw a party of three, two young ladies and a young gentleman, coming towards him—not in the opposite direction, however; they evidently aimed towards the summit of the hill as he was doing, but they had come from a different point, and unless he changed his course he saw that they must soon meet.

As they came nearer together, he saw that one of the young ladies was no other than Margaret Ashton, and the young gentleman he soon recognised as Frederick War-

ren. The other young lady was altogether a stranger to him.

The party likewise recognised him, at least two of them did, and Margaret immediately spoke to the strange young lady.

"Hetty, here is the young minister of whom I have spoken; now is your time to add another admirer to your list."

"Thank you, Margaret," was the somewhat scornful reply; "parson crows are not in my line, especially Methodist parson crows."

No one ever called Margaret, Maggie. Her brother Reginald had tried it once or twice, but it did not seem at all right. There was something in her nature which was altogether foreign to pet names, just the same as a nickname would be altogether out of place when applied to Shakespeare.

"You would not take him for a parson, though," said Margaret, in reply; "one thing in his favour is, that he seldom appears in clerical dress."

"Now, Margaret, you know that if there is one man that I despise more than another, it is a minister, while a Methodist minister is my aversion. You know that time after time we have exchanged our views about them, until we are agreed that both they and their profession are swindles."

Hetty Brooklyn, the young lady who had given expression to this somewhat flippant speech, was a particular friend of Margaret's; they had been educated together at the same school and since then had been very intimate. They had read sceptical books, and talked about them together until both of them pretended to give up a great deal of the Christian faith.

There was a difference, however. Margaret's unbelief arose from the fact that she had a strong and enquiring

mind, and that which could not be demonstrated was to her not worthy of belief. Margaret from her own particular standpoint tried to find the truth, while Hetty Brooklyn had not sufficient strength of mind or character to dive deep into things. It seemed very smart and learned to laugh at the curates and their teaching, and she had accordingly done so without being able to give a true tangible reason for her opinions.

Hence it was that when, shortly after, Easterbrook was introduced to her, the greeting she gave him was anything but cordial, and Margaret, noticing it, felt somewhat inclined to be more gracious to him than usual.

"You are out for a walk, Mr. Easterbrook," she said; "surely your duties as a pastor do not lead you this way?"

"No, Miss Ashton," was the reply, "I have come simply for a walk."

"We shall be glad then if you will join us and go back to our house to tea. Father has been wondering what has become of you lately."

"It's a jolly cold day, Easterbrook," said Warren, who since the encounter with Carlo had appeared desirous of being friendly. "I wish it would freeze a little harder so as to give us a little skating."

"Yes, it is cold," replied Jabez, "but it is glorious weather. I love to feel the hard earth beneath my feet, and to hear the wind sweeping over the hills."

This led Margaret to give expression to a statement, which in a few minutes gave rise to a theological discussion, Warren meanwhile strutting on discontentedly.

"Come, Easterbrook, I vote that we change the subject," he said; "neither of us is very spiritually minded, I mean neither the ladies nor myself, and we shall only get to squabbling if we continue."

"But I suppose," said Hetty Brooklyn, "that Mr. Easterbrook wishes to be instant in season and out of season,

and I do not know a more fitting subject for missionary operations than yourself, Mr. Warren."

"I think Mr. Warren is right, nevertheless," replied Jabez. "I don't know what led me to talk in this way, and I don't wish to talk on a subject that is distasteful. See, here we are on the summit of the hill, and a glorious view we have."

"Yes," replied Warren, "and unless I am mistaken, I see something that is likely to give us far more pleasure then looking on those cold, bleak, rugged hills."

"What?" asked both the young ladies in chorus.

"Why, I see a gipsy tent, and our groom was telling me this morning that there is a wonderful fortune-teller among the gipsies who have camped at the foot of this hill; let us go down and have a talk with them."

"Just the thing," cried Miss Brooklyn. "I see a treat before us."

Without more talk, they immediately walked towards the gipsy tent which was pitched in a hollow, and sheltered from the wind.

Although the young minister accompanied them, he did not enjoy the thought of talking with people on subjects that were to him sacred, especially as he was afraid that their conversation would result in little less than blasphemy. Still he had a spice of the romantic and the mysterious in his nature, and so he made his way thither. Margaret had no thoughts of this kind about them. She regarded all their talk as merely nonsense, and she felt nothing of that dread which some feel when pretensions are made to tell of what lies in the future.

When they came to the tent, they found it deserted, save by one lean, old woman, who was bent nearly double by age. She was by no means prepossessing, and yet there was about her face a certain indefinable power. Her eyes were large, black, and piercing, and the shaggy, grey eye-

brows which hung above them made her somewhat resemble the witches of our childhood. Her forehead was wrinkled, and yet it gave evidence of great intellectual power, while the nose was straight and almost classical in shape. It was impossible to tell anything of her character by the shape of her mouth, for it was sunken, and she constantly kept her jaws moving as if trying to munch with her toothless gums.

As Jabez looked at her he felt that she was not a woman one could trifle with; there was a look of wild daring about her, aged as she was, which had a tendency to repel the frivolous and scornful.

As the party stopped in front of the tent, the old woman picked up a black pipe, filled it with some dried weeds, and taking a coal from off the fire, lit it. She did not look towards them after they had stopped, she seemed entirely bent on the business of lighting her pipe, crooning and grumbling as she did so. Then, without taking her eyes from the fire, she said in a hoarse croaking voice:

"There be four of ye." Here she stopped, and with the forefinger of her left hand she touched the tips of the four fingers on her right hand. The tips of the fingers, did I say? no, that would be almost impossible, for the nails of the fingers had grown long and crooked over the finger tips, so she only touched the end of the nails, as if counting them one by one. Still she did not look up, but continued:

"And what might ye want with me?"

"We want our fortunes told, Mother," replied Warren.

"You want *your* fortune told," replied the old woman, looking up; "better not, my lad. I don't know, though." She bent her eyes keenly upon him, and stopped for a time. "Ye have no fortune," she continued; "it is a small life ye will live, because others have made your money."

Warren laughed.

"Yes, ye may laugh, but I've not finished with ye yet," she said angrily, apparently aroused by his laugh. "Ye are one of the pug dog breed, my lad, and will only do that which is worthy of a pug dog, and ye will marry a wife as will love ye just as she might love a pug dog. I have spoken, I shall say no more to ye," and she turned scornfully from him.

"But you have not seen my hand," said Warren; "how then can you tell my fortune?"

"I have seen your eyes, your face, that is enough to tell your breed," she snarled.

She turned to Miss Brooklyn, still squatting by the fire, still smoking her pipe.

"Do you want your fortune told?" she asked.

"If you please, Mother," replied the young lady in a frightened tone of voice.

"Let me see your hand, and cross it with silver."

She pulled off her glove, and the old woman gave one glance at it, then looked in her face.

"There's nothing much to go by," she muttered, "no depth in the lines, no strength in the lines, they are light, thin everywhere; light and thin, light and thin. Did you ever have any sorrow worth mentioning, lass?" she said, speaking louder.

"Never," replied Miss Brooklyn.

"It will come, sometime, somehow," crooned the old woman, "and when it does come, as it will come, thank the cycles of Fate, thank the eternal forces of Fate, for sorrow will be your salvation."

"But I thought, Mother," replied Miss Brooklyn, "that you would tell me who my husband is to be, and all about him."

"Husband! do ye think of nothing but husbands? Think of life, its meaning, its destiny."

Jabez was beginning to get interested. This woman was more than an ordinary gipsy, and spoke more than gipsy rant. He gathered that she was a reader of character; she looked at the eyes, at the face, rather than at the lines in the hand. True, she tried to make her language appear mysterious, but she was evidently a woman of some education and power of thought.

No sooner had she finished speaking, than she turned to Jabez, and repeated the same words she had spoken to Miss Brooklyn.

"Do you want your fortune told?"

"No, thank you," was the reply.

"No?" repeated the old woman, peering curiously at him. "Dark eyes, dark hair, dark skin, tall and strong. You have no faith in me."

"I must confess, Mother, that I have not."

"Do you believe, then, that the stars tell no truths? That heaven and earth are not full of meaning?"

"I believe that the stars and the earth are full of meaning."

"Ah!" and the old woman rose to her feet, and stood nearly straight. "There's fire in his eye, strength in his mouth, but there's much missing. Fate is strong, young man."

"God is stronger."

"God! Fate and God are one."

"You are right, they are one. And my life will be just that which, by the help of God, I make it. You do not know the future, therefore do not blaspheme."

"Ho! ho!" laughed the old woman, "speaks like a parson, but does not dress like one. But what of that, parsons live not in cloth, but in heart, in mind. Let me look at your hand."

"I cannot afford to cross it with silver, Mother."

"Silver! It reveals nothing of you, young man. Give me your hand."

Jabez held it out, and the old woman minutely examined it. She traced the lines in the palm of his right hand with the nail of her forefinger, then threw it down muttering, "Mystery, mystery."

"You are right, Mother, it is mystery," said Jabez.

"Scoff if you will, but it is not mystery to me. I see what you cannot; but the hand only half reveals. Look at me straight in the eye, straight, mark you. Ha, the film is moving, now I see. Struggles, struggles, in mind, in heart. Mountains, gulfs, dark floods, rolling thunders, peace. All are before you, young man."

"I believe it, Mother. I myself can almost see it all now, but it is owing to that over which I have no control."

"Control! never. Can you control the stars in their course? Can you control the wind? the waves? Fate designed thousands of years ago that you should have a troubled mind, that you should think, and that your thinking should throw you up and down, up and down."

"My troubled mind is constitutional, Mother."

"Constitutional! Who governs constitutions? What caused your forefathers to have the germs of unrest in their nature? Fate. Could you help being born with a mind which longed for truth, and a heart that longed for love? You could not. Who is to decide whether your longing will be satisfied? Fate."

"I say God."

"Who is God?"

"My Father."

"Do you believe that?"

"Wholly, fully."

"Do you not believe in me?"

"I believe you are naturally a good judge of character, naturally, this has been improved by observation and long years of experience, and because of it calculating the

natural course of things, you know pretty well what th general outcome will be."

"I will talk to you no more, I have spoken to three, there is another, and she is an unbeliever. I see it. I know it. The rest of you must stand aside. What I say to her must be said alone."

The others stepped aside, laughingly, and left Margaret and the old woman alone.

"Your hand, maiden," said the gipsy imperiously.

"I have no faith, mind," said Margaret, "still I'll cross it with a shilling, there now," and she opened her hand to the old woman.

"The line of life is fair and long, and you will have a long life; but here and there are stars, these denote trouble Young maiden, you will not marry the man you love. You will marry neither of them which stand a little distance away."

"Thanks, good mother. I have no desire to do so."

"Not now, but you will, mark my words, you will, for the line of life is cut by a line coming from the mount of Venus. The plain of Mars has lines running across it which are distorted by crooked lines, these denote something; let me look at the face and eyes more closely, and I'll tell you Sol governs the right eye, the moon governs the left. There's a dark struggle before you. You will be longing and longing for something, and your nature will be stirred, stirred by a dark man. But a film comes over all, and I see nothing but dissatisfaction. You will love the dark man who is here with you, but you will never marry him, never."

The old woman squatted down again, took the silver pieces they had given her, and put them in a bag that hung by her side, threw some crumbs to a magpie that hopped near them, relighted her pipe, and spoke not another word;

while the young people walked silently away, wondering at the strange talk of the gipsy.

Hetty Brooklyn was the first to break the silence.

"What did she say to you, Margaret, why did she tell us to go away so that we might not hear what she said?"

"I will not waste words in telling what she did say. It was sheer nonsense all," cried Margaret, "still it's an afternoon's diversion."

"Hear, hear," replied Warren, who had been anything but pleased by the way he had been dismissed by the old woman; "it was good fun for the time, but it is not worth while to talk about it now. Look here, Miss Brooklyn, you can see my home from this spot."

Jabez and Margaret walked on together and left the other couple behind. The talk of the gipsy had put Margaret in a strange humour, and she felt she would like to have a talk with the young minister on subjects which naturally arose out of their afternoon's amusement.

"Have you an engagement to-night, Mr. Easterbrook?" he asked suddenly.

"No, Miss Ashton, for a wonder I am at liberty," he replied, wondering at her apparent interest in his doings.

"There is a good concert at Moortown to-night; if you would like to go, we shall be very glad if you will accompany us."

"Thank you, I shall be very glad: how many are going from the Grange?"

"Only Reginald, Miss Brooklyn and myself."

"Will not Mr. Warren be present?"

"I do not know that he will. Indeed, I remember hearing him tell Reginald that he had to go to a political committee meeting to-night. Besides, he is not fond of concerts."

Easterbrook wondered much at this behaviour, she had always been so distant with him; and his heart beat more

rapidly than usual, and in spite of her previous apparent dislike, looked forward to the walk to Moortown with this queenly maiden, for although he was not much given to vague fancyings, the thought impressed itself upon his mind, that something important would be the outcome of their being together.

CHAPTER IX.

OLD FAITHS IN NEW LIGHT.

It was a pleasant party that sat around the tea-table at Heathertown Grange that evening. Miss Brooklyn laughingly told of their encounter with the gipsy, and repeated what she could of the conversation they had had together, while the rest of the family laughed outright at her witticisms. Reginald Ashton, especially, was amused at the fate Warren had received at the old woman's hands, and demanded that Margaret should relate her fortune as well as the rest. Margaret, however, was very quiet; she had taken no part in the conversation, and seemed in a very thoughtful mood. She listened attentively to all that was said, and seemed to be waiting anxiously for the time to come when they should start for Moortown.

When Mr. Ashton heard that Margaret had asked Jabez to accompany her to the concert, he was much surprised and yet pleased that she should have so far softened towards him. Much as it grieved him to find that the young minister had by his bigotry and narrowness alienated several young men from the church, he liked him exceedingly for his thoroughness of character, and his simple, unassuming demeanour.

Once or twice he had determined to speak to him with regard to his modes of thinking and reading; but he was, naturally, a reticent man in such matters. Besides, he concluded on further consideration that a young man

of Easterbrook's disposition would be, by degrees, led to a higher and a broader grasp of truth, and that the best thing for him would be to let him feel, from the very wants of his own life, that there was a higher world than that in which he lived at present.

He was glad to see the young people walk away together to the concert, for he knew it would do them all good, so he wished them a pleasant time, and a safe return, and then went back by the warm fire.

During the walk to Moortown the conversation between the party was general; they did not divide into couples, but walked along together conversing on ordinary topics; but after the concert was over, Reginald led the way with Miss Brooklyn, and left Jabez and Margaret together.

The night was very cold; but they were wrapped up warmly, and as the roads were dry, they enjoyed the keen frosty air and the cold wind. They were not long in passing through the little town, and soon came to an open space from which several roads branched.

"I see," said Jabez, "that Reginald and Miss Brooklyn are going the nearest way home; for my own part, I feel like going for a long walk."

"So do I," replied Margaret, quickly; "let us go home by Mill Lane, it is quite early yet."

Immediately they turned into a different road from that which the others had gone, Jabez wondering more and more at the young lady's behaviour.

Silently they walked on for a few seconds, and then they both stopped. Just before them stood a giant tree, its branches waving wildly about, beating each other as if in mad frenzy, while as the wind blew through them it made a sad moaning sound as though it wanted to tell some strange weird tale, but could not put it into words.

Presently they walked on together again in silence, until after a few seconds Margaret burst out suddenly:

"Mr. Easterbrook, do you believe that your religion is true?"

Jabez was astonished at the abruptness and the strangeness of the question, and so replied confusedly:

"Excuse me, Miss Ashton, what—that is, how—what did I understand you to mean?"

"Do you believe your religion to be true?" she repeated, in a low, steady voice. "Do you believe the Bible to be true, or rather do you believe it inspired in the way you teach it? Do you believe you have a future? Can you really say with the Church Creed, that you 'believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting?'"

"Do you ask the question seriously?" returned Jabez.

"Yes, seriously."

"Then," replied he, "I do, with all my heart, and with all my soul."

"But do you believe because you have been taught to believe it from your childhood? Is your faith the faith of your forefathers, or is it your own faith, a part of yourself?"

"Truly, Miss Ashton, I believe in my religion; it is indeed my own faith handed down to me, it is true, from my forefathers, but a part of myself now, the most potent force in my life."

Margaret was silent.

"Miss Ashton," continued he, "do you believe in Jesus Christ, do you believe in our religion, do you believe in the resurrection and eternal life?"

"I do not know; I do not think I do."

"Is—is it really possible?" said Jabez excitedly.

"Do I frighten you? Yes, I am what your church members call an unbeliever. I have little or no faith in the mysticism you teach, little faith in your so-called spiritual forces."

"And yet your father, your mother, your brother are true Christians."

"Yes, that is so, and to a very large extent I believe in their religion. That is, I believe in principles of righteousness, truth, purity, and love; but I do not believe in the superstitious associations of those principles."

"Then you do believe in Jesus Christ?"

"In a way, yes, that is, I believe that such a man lived and died; but I do not believe in His miraculous birth, resurrection, and ascension. Strip from Jesus Christ the trappings of His Divinity, and He stands out as the grandest man of any age or country; let Him keep those trappings, and He is but a pagan god, a relic of heathen mythology."

Jabez was rendered speechless by this reply. He had heard that Miss Ashton was a strange girl, holding many strange views, indeed, from his conversation with her, he knew that her faith was not strong. But this bare, blank statement of her utter unbelief in what he regarded as the great central fact in Christianity was beyond anything he had conceived, and in his heart came a great fear for her salvation, and a great longing to lead her into the light of Christ. So, after quietly thinking for some time, he blurted out the old argument to prove the reality of faith, which did not seem at all applicable to their conversation.

"The best evidence in proof of our Christianity, Miss Ashton, is the fact that wherever it has gone it has brought joy, peace, light, comfort, and civilisation."

"Admitting that," she replied, "it in no way justifies the mysterious halo with which you surround your central figure. For instance, do you believe in the truth and Divine source of the religion of the ancient Greeks and Romans?"

"Certainly not, Miss Ashton."

"You do not. And yet for hundreds of years it was a great, guiding, ruling power of those mighty peoples. It contained germs of truth, and as long as they adhered to it, they kept their power; when they renounced it, they be-

came weak and sinful. Those people could have said, as you have just said, that wherever their religion went and was truly believed, it had a tendency to uplift, comfort, and civilise."

"But there is proof from its own history that it had not sufficient power to hold its adherents, and it was superseded by Christianity. It was proved false by the science and the philosophy of the learned, and thus died a natural death."

"And do you not think that your religion is doomed to die in a similar way?"

"Never, Miss Ashton."

"Now sincerely, what do you think really proves the Divinity of your religion?"

"I am willing to abide by the test I have just given."

"And I reply that it is not sufficient. Any noble character, any noble life, any noble thought, uplifts and ennobles. If you adduce that as a proof, I can adduce the same proof in favour of Buddhism and Mahommedanism. Buddha was a great and good man, and by his life and teaching he uplifted the people. Mahommed by his life and teaching led the Arabs to a better, holier life."

"But not in nearly the same degree as Christianity."

"Perhaps not. As far as I have read, Jesus Christ was by far the greatest man of the three, by far the truest man of the three. But Mahommedanism and Buddhism are better far than the low fetishism of the savage tribes. Therefore, if that which has a tendency to uplift has a Divine origin, the religions I have named have a Divine origin, only, I admit, in a lesser degree than Christianity."

This mode of reasoning staggered Jabez; he had been taught to believe that these religions were wholly harmful; and were modes by which the evil one frustrated the work of Christianity. He could not see that whatever truth there was in any system must come from God, and that these beliefs were gropings after the truth, the consummation of

which is in the religion of Christ. His education would not allow him to admit that whatever good there was in anything must come from God, and is a ray of light "from Him Who lighted every man coming into the world." He had often sung that hymn of Charles Wesley's in which the prayer is made that the doctrine of Mahommed might be driven back to hell, and hence this statement of Margaret's upset the whole structure of his argument.

Margaret had for a long time wanted this opportunity of talking with him. On the first Sunday of his stay in Heathertown he had by means of his strong faith met her objections to his sermon in a way she had not expected, and she wanted to be able to argue with him when there would be no danger of hurting her parents' feelings by her unbelief; she wanted to put her doubts in their strongest light and stagger him. Why she wanted to do this she could not tell; she had told Miss Brooklyn that very day that she disliked him, although she could not have told why, and now as for the first time they were alone together, she took a strange pleasure in trying to undermine the foundations of his faith and his hope.

"But after all, Mr. Easterbrook," she continued, after a little silence on both sides, "we live in a strange world, and life is a strange thing. That gipsy to whom we talked this afternoon has one belief, you have another, and I—well, I hardly know what I believe. We are here in this world, held to the earth by the law of gravitation, and we are rushing through space at a most incredible speed. We are something—nothing. Here are you and I together, two tiny spots on this great earth, which is but an atom in the infinite universe, and we are talking of that about which we know little or nothing."

"But I feel, Miss Ashton, that I am in the hands of God, and am safe."

"See," continued Margaret, looking upward, without

heeding his reply, "we can see some of the stars. To the gipsy, those stars are potent forces in our lives, governing and controlling us. To others they are simply points of light, to others still they are worlds, living worlds, the homes of living beings. Is not all that we see the result of blind, unthinking, unknowable force?"

She seemed to be talking to herself as she said this, as though she were unconscious of Easterbrook's presence.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," said Jabez, quietly.

"What is God?" she said in reply. "Is He not fate, force, or something quite as indefinite? Did you ever read Comte, Mr. Easterbrook?"

"Never."

"Have you read any of the writings of those men whose reason has led them away from a belief of Christianity?"

"I have not."

"Then, how can you enter into their difficulties and into their lives? Those men have been searchers after truth, and I think it the duty of every teacher of every sort to be versed in the arguments and theories of those whose thinkings have led them away from their own standpoint of belief."

Jabez was silent.

"I was asking you if ever you had read Comte," she continued. "You remember, when we came out of Moortown a few minutes ago, we stopped and looked at a giant tree which threw its branches about as though in despair; well, Comte tells us that ages ago, men in their ignorant state saw how the wind blew, and the lightning flashed, and they thought there must be an angry spirit in the clouds, and from this germ of thought evolved the present idea of God."

Had Jabez read Comte, he would have been able to adduce from Comte's own teaching the need of religion;

but he had not, and because of it, this thought, and the rest of Margaret's strange talk, were beginning to work on his mind.

"You have been leading me out of the track in which I usually walk," he said, after a while; "but I believe in the Bible, I believe in the truths it teaches with regard to the creation of the world, and of man. I have not seen or heard of any theory which supersedes it, therefore I rest on my old foundation."

"And do you literally interpret the Bible with regard to creation?" she asked.

"I see no reason to disbelieve it," he replied.

"In that case," she replied, "the human race is nearly 6,000 years old, and the rest of creation a few days older."

"Why, Miss Ashton, do you know otherwise?"

"Geology tells me that this world was at one time liquid fire, and floated many ages through space, that in course of time—time to which 6,000 years is a mere drop in a bucket —it cooled and hardened, until it became the home of vegetable and animal life. Mr. Easterbrook, what am I to believe, demonstrated facts, or fabulous stories which have no foundation in truth?"

"Scientific facts," replied the minister, "or so-called scientific facts are often very little but unscientific theories. And I do not choose to give up the belief which has sustained millions in life and death for the mere production of the human brain."

"Who shall say they are merely the production of the human brain? Every new discovery leads us away from the theory that the world is only a few thousand years old."

"Well, if I were to admit all you say, we are led back in spite of all to a cause. 'Every effect must have a cause.'"

"We know very little about effects, and less about causes," she replied, "but what we know contradicts what the gipsy

said this afternoon, and much of what the Christian religion teaches."

"But it does not prove that life can be without a life giver; only life can produce life."

"You have put your finger on a salient point; but much that men have thought unprovable has been proved by investigation. Life does not lie in such mystery as it once did, and that which seemed to show the impossibility of life existing without pre-existent life is fast being explained away. Until very recently it was supposed that there was a chasm which could not be bridged over. between the very chemistry of inorganic and organic bodies, and that no animal substances could be compounded by the chemist. That doctrine is now overthrown. Organic or living compounds can now be formed artificially. Does not that indicate that in time the mystery of life will have passed away? Chemistry teaches us, moreover, that lifeless bodies when brought together under certain conditions, give rise to protoplasm, and this protoplasm exhibits the phenomena of life. Now the professor under whom I studied chemistry told us that chemical knowledge was as yet in its infancy; but if it proves what it does while in its present stage, what may it not prove in time when there will be increased facilities for knowledge?"

Jabez listened as one in a dream; this young lady whom he had come to teach was much further advanced in the world of knowledge than he. His studies had been confined to one phase of truth, she had gone wider and deeper than he. He felt slightly afraid of her, and as she spoke a thousand doubts flashed into his mind.

She, however, seemed to be enjoying their conversation, and as he looked at her he saw that her eyes flashed, and her fine face was animated by the thoughts that passed through her brain. Still, he felt there was something which she had not touched, a hidden chord, that was behind and be

yond all; but he could not tell what it was, neither could he give an answer to her arguments. He did feel there was an answer, and he determined to find it.

They had by this time entered her father's grounds, and he knew their conversation must end for the present, so he said quietly but earnestly:

"Miss Ashton, what your motive has been in talking in this way I do not know, but I thank you with all my heart. I cannot answer your objections; but you have set me thinking, and you have determined me to read those subjects of which I am now ignorant, and I *will* answer your questions, I know, mark you, I *know* that something is wrong in your mode of reasoning, I know you have missed something, for although your remarks have been pungent, and clever, they far from satisfy the head, while the heart is left untouched and uncared for. I have something in my heart now, in spite of all you have said, which, if I could express, would answer all your intellectual arguments. Still, I thank you. You have aroused me, you have unsettled my mind. I am glad of it, because I believe I needed it. I have walked in narrow grooves, but I am determined to go wider, to go deeper. But you are in the wrong, for with all your arguments, you leave the heart unsatisfied, and what is life, whatever its origin or destiny, if the heart be not filled with satisfaction?"

Margaret, as she stood by his side on the cold frosty night, experienced the same feeling as she did on the first Sunday evening he spent in Heathertown. She knew that as far as argument was concerned, she had the best of it. His answers had been weak and unconvincing, and yet as he had spoken the words, "You have unsettled my mind. I am glad of it, because I believe I needed it," she knew that he was not conquered, she had aroused rather than confounded him, strengthened rather than weakened his faith.

She felt, too, a force in what he said. Her theories did

not satisfy the heart, and what was cleverness, what were chemical experiments, what were facts in geology, what was anything and everything if there were a great craving in the soul for something it never realised?

When they came to the door she expected him to go in, but he declined.

"No, Miss Ashton," he said, "your words mean more to me than you think; they have caused innumerable thoughts to flash into my mind. I want to be alone; I want to think; I want to read. There is opened up to me an unexplored world of thought; I want to enter it and to know something about it. But I am not afraid, for I do not go alone. Good-night."

Margaret saw how his strong face indicated the emotion of his heart as he spoke. She stood in the doorway after he had said good-night in spite of the cold, biting wind, and watched his tall, stalwart form as he strode down the carriage-drive. There was nothing weak about him, nothing undecided in the footsteps that crunched the gravel on the drive, nothing simpering in his strong, deep voice, there was manliness stamped upon him, and she felt it.

It was strange for this self-sufficient young lady to do so, but she stood in the porch a long time after he had gone, seemingly unconscious of time or place, stood and looked as though she, too, saw a new and unexplored world of thought. After a while she aroused herself, heaved a deep sigh, and then murmured the words:

"After all, he is a splendid fellow."

Then she knocked at the door, which was quickly opened, and the servant watched her as she went upstairs, and wondered "what made Miss Margaret so quiet and sad like."

CHAPTER X.

STRUGGLING FOR FAITH.

When Easterbrook arrived at his lodgings, his mind was strangely excited. He had felt so confident about his religious faith, so sure about his theology, that during the first part of his conversation with Margaret he was dogmatic and defiant, but just before they arrived at Heatherdown Grange he seemed to see things in a new light. The world of truth, somehow, seemed to become larger, and he felt that he had only lived in one confined spot. He sat down in his armchair beside the fire and tried to think.

There are, I am afraid, but few people who really think. In spite of all our boast about mental culture, it is evident that a large number of people allow others to do all their thinking. Politicians to a large extent have their political beliefs formed by the leading articles in the newspapers they read, instead of taking facts as they stand, and deducing opinions from those facts; or, better still, taking sound principles, and, from a thorough study of them, building their political faith. Hence it is that, unknowing to ourselves, we live the life of parasites rather than of living organisms. This is true with regard to the theological belief and religious faith of thousands. Faith in too many cases is not the result of conviction, but only a careless assent to something which we have been told is true.

Jabez had never tested his belief thoroughly. Not

through carelessness, however, but because he fancied he had attained a true knowledge of things, and in his inner life he had conceived, although he would not perhaps have said it, that he had arrived at absolute truth on theological matters, and those who did not agree with him must be wrong, for he was sure he was right. This was largely the result of his training and the books he had read, which were dogmatic in the extreme. He adhered strongly to the belief in personal authority also, and had thus been fettered by beliefs of hundreds of years ago, instead of soaring into higher and purer regions, which God is revealing to His children day by day.

On this night, however, some power seemed to have broken every bond, and he was free. It was a strange freedom, however. Hitherto he had felt secure; but now he seemed to be floating in space, uninfluenced by gravitating power. Margaret's belief had thrown him off his balance, and left him hanging he knew not where.

"Where am I—what am I?" he asked. "What is life, what is death? What is God, and where is God?"

His mind waded through much of his creed without arriving at any satisfactory result until he came back to the substratum of all belief—the existence of God.

"Do I know there is a God?" he asked himself. "Let me look up some of my examination arguments for the proof of a Divine existence."

He took down from his shelves two or three theological hand-books, and read the arguments therein brought forward but they did not convey conviction to his mind. It seemed conclusive enough to argue that design must have a designer and that this universe gives innumerable evidences of design, and therefore must have been designed by some infinitely wise being; but it did not satisfy him. He could scarcely tell why, but somehow he felt that matter might be eternal, and that from the inherent forces of that matter

things might come to be as they were. It was mystery—mystery all. As far as he could understand, space was infinite, and if infinite then co-extensive with God. Well, after all, what were we but tiny dots floating through space, and who could tell how we came to be, who could tell what we should become? Paul told us that every house was built by some man, and He who built all things was God; but who was Paul? Only a poor simple creature like himself. Why then was he to believe in him? But, after all, did he believe in God? really and truly believe in Him? That was the question which lay at the root of all.

Reader, did you ever, after having freed yourself from all conventionalities and traditional opinions, face this question in its bare blank form, "Do I feel sure of God?" It would be far better for us if we thought more about our faith, for if it is true, the more we think about it the better.

Jabez faced the question, faced it with all the powers of his mind; but the mind refused to give satisfaction. Then he brought himself to look at it in another way.

"I am going to kneel down to pray presently," he said to himself; "am I sure I am praying to something?"

It is a staggering question to ask, and one of vital importance, for there are thousands of prayers that are vague and unreal because those who pray do not feel the reality and presence of God. If the young minister's faith had been conventional, if his religion had been simply an intellectual assent to some tradition, it would have vanished like vapour at this question; but it was more than that. His faith did not rest upon hair-splitting logic, as proof of our Father's existence; he felt God every day, every hour, He was real to him as the world around was real, because God was his life, the controller and governor of his every action.

He rested there firmly. He believed in God, he believed in a good God, and for the time he could go no further; he tried to go on and on, but his mind refused to

carry him. His heart, however, beat light and joyous, and his faith was more dear to him than ever it had been before. He had tested it carefully. True, it was but a part of the religious faith, but it was the foundation of it, and better be sure of a little than have a vague belief in much without being sure of any.

Had you asked him that night why he was sure of God, he would have said that his capacity to realise God was as real as his power for seeing, and God was as real to that capacity as the objects which he saw were real to his eyes. And nothing could have shaken him from that belief, because he felt it to be a part of his life.

There are men who look with considerable disfavour on those whose faith is small, while their own faith has been large, and they have wondered why their brethren could not believe as they believed without question. On the careful analysis of the two, however, it is often to be found that the smallest faith is the most real, for it has been fought for, struggled for, until it is true and precious to the believer; while there is many a so-called large faith which is as vague and misty as are the words force, and space, to an uncultured mind.

Feeling assured of the reality of God, Jabez knelt down and prayed, and then he retired to rest, knowing that whatever else might be true God was true, and he was safe in His hands.

The next morning he paid a visit to the curate of the village, and after a few trivial remarks said quietly:

"Mr. Lethbridge, I am given to understand that some of the young men belonging to my church have come to you for help and advice."

"Have you any objections to that?" replied the curate, for he fancied Jabez was going to take him to task for trying to proselytise his members.

"Instead of having objections, I am very glad. I find that

I have not been able to give them the food they required, neither have I been able to lead them to the place where it was to be found, so it is a matter of thankfulness that they have come to you. I have come rather to ask you a favour Would you mind telling me your methods in study, and your course of reading during the last few years?"

"Give me your hand on that," cried the curate. "I am glad you are that kind of fellow. I gave those young men who belonged to your church little or no encouragement until I found out who really wanted help, and those who did come regularly now. With regard to telling you my modes of study, I am a little bit doubtful. My reading has been of a miscellaneous kind, and about twelve months ago I thought I was going wrong altogether, I became so unsettled. Still, if you are brave enough to face a thorough course of reading, I shall be glad to help you."

Jabez told him just where he stood. He did not mention Margaret's name at all, but he told him that he had been gradually led to see that the world in which he had been living was very small, and he wanted guidance in trying to find the larger world which he was sure existed.

The curate, after a long conversation with him, took down from his shelves half-a-dozen volumes and placed them in Easterbrook's hands, and soon after they separated.

If I could do justice in describing the workings of Jabez's mind during the next few months it would be anything but interesting to my readers, for it would be to lead them through intricate mazes and through dark paths, and might not, after all, be helpful. One mind is differently constituted from another, and the way by which one arrives at the truth may be blocked up to another. I can only say that those few months made a great difference to his mental life. He scarcely ever went into company, he did the work devolving upon him as well as he could, and then spent the rest of his time in real, hard study. The curate, after having

lent him books, made no comment on them, but left him to dig himself and to think out for himself the problems they raised.

It took him a week to read the first work Mr. Lethbridge had advised him to read. It would have taken some men longer, but Easterbrook had a powerful mind when fairly set to work, and he mastered the arguments easily. The book had a two-fold tendency. The first was to show him how ignorant he really was, and the second was to make him long to read more. After he had read two or three more he was in a maze. They were works of the old Greek philosophers, and for a time he was staggered by the force of their reasoning, but he felt sure of God in his heart, and that helped him to master difficulties. Then the curate lent him analyses which he had made of some of the French and German writers. They dealt with theories of inspiration, with the doctrine of miracles, with the Divinity of Christ, and these more seriously undermined his faith in Christianity than anything had done. Still he went on reading, turning his attention this time to modern objections to religion, until several months had passed away.

About this time the curate came to visit him at his lodgings.

"How do you feel by this time, Easterbrook?" he said laughingly, for they had become very friendly.

"I don't know. I thought when I had read those books, I should have got a world of knowledge; but I've only touched the fringe."

"And none of us in this world ever will but touch the fringe of knowledge; but how does what you have touched affect your faith? Are you as sure about your belief as you were?"

"Yes, and no. Some things I have been obliged to relinquish, or rather to modify, until they appear altogether different; in other cases I have seen the materialistic trap

pings by which some of the sublimest doctrines have been surrounded, pulled aside; but this I can thank God for—the essentials of Christianity, yea, Christ Himself, is more real to me than ever He was. This thought, however, has become more and more impressed on my mind. The day of revelation is not over; and God is always revealing to His children as much of the truth as they can bear. I have come to see this, that all scientific discoveries are revelations from God, and woe be to us if we shut our eyes to any truth from whencesoever it may come. Twelve months ago I thought I had found nearly all the truth, to-day I find I have found but very little; but that which I have found is real and true to my heart."

"And do you think you will be able to preach Methodist doctrines now?" asked the curate smiling.

"With more fervour than ever I could, for I begin to see a meaning in that which I never before dreamed about," was the reply. "I may be obliged to re-set some of the old truths; but they remain, nevertheless, and are a greater power in my soul than ever they were."

"And will you go on with your reading, Easterbrook?"

"I certainly shall, my dear fellow. Not as hard as I have been doing, for my health would not stand it; but I shall, if all is well, be a student all my life, and be true to the light God is giving to man all the world over."

Thus Easterbrook's mental life was changed. The scepticism of a young lady had set him thinking. During those months in which he had been studying so hard, he had never once seen Margaret alone. She had come to chapel once, when he had been preaching, but he had not been to Heathertown Grange during the whole time, until his absence was wondered at, and Mrs. Ashton, as she watched his pale face, wondered if he were not ill.

As might have been expected, Jabez's mode of life and

thought caused a difference in his preaching. He no longer talked worn-out platitudes to the people, neither on the other hand was he so simple and interesting. Many went away scarcely knowing what his meaning was, while others of quicker intellect saw that he was wading through deep waters. Reginald Ashton and others saw that he was trying to grasp at something high and distant, which as yet seemed vague and misty to him; but they also saw with joy after some weeks that he was grasping the kernel of that of which a little while before he had only touched the shell. As the summer advanced, the congregations came to chapel with a look of expectancy on their faces, for the truth by degrees broke upon them that their minister was day by day searching for good food to give them; and as week by week his mind became clearer, and by looking at truth from different standpoints and bringing to bear upon it all the light which he could get, he brought out new and beautiful truths, they realised the value of study and investigation.

In one case it was specially marked. Not long after he came there he preached a sermon on "Our Father." It was a repetition of old statements, and was to a large extent barren and unhelpful, but nearly four months after his conversation with Margaret, he preached again from the same text. He had been studying a book on science all the previous week, and in this sermon he was enabled from his reading to show how God had been a Father to His children. From facts in geology, he showed how God had been preparing this world to be the home of His creatures. He described minute forms of life; and showed how the Divine care was bestowed upon them, placing them under certain conditions, and giving them such forms as to enable them to live the life they were evidently intended for; and as he, his own heart filled with the idea of the Fatherhood of God, dwelt lovingly on the facts which truth seekers had revealed to them, the people felt the doctrine

to be more real, and more precious than they had ever before felt it.

As may be expected, however, this change did not suit all classes. Some of the older ones preferred the old style of preaching, and would rather have heard the doctrine of the Atonement preached in the old way, and be told that all they had to do was to believe that and they were safe. Most of the people felt, however, that whether he was right or wrong, he was trying to get at the truth, and they realised, moreover, that his heart was in his sermons, and he, somehow, made God and Christ more real to them, while the Bible had a richer, fuller meaning.

I hope none of my readers will think that the young minister was becoming a convert to so-called "modern thought." I do not think he thought anything about that. It was simply this. The books which the curate had lent him had set him thinking; and now everything he preached passed through the sieve of his own mind. When he took a text he thought it out without troubling as to whether his opinions agreed with other people's interpretation. He preached what he conceived to be God-revealed truths, independent of creeds or dogmas, truths which he conceived would lead the world to a richer, nobler life. He did not allow others to do his digging for him, but he prayerfully searched the Scriptures for himself, and the truths were all the more precious and beautiful to him, for he went to the true source for truth, and made it his own. He did not believe on authority, or rather he believed on the highest authority, the authority of his own moral consciousness; hence he believed in the inspiration of the Bible, because it appealed to that consciousness, as the highest truth, rather than because the names of Ezra or Solomon were attached to the books.

During those months, as indeed for many months afterwards, he had many doubts, doubts which a man who never

thought, and never read, could not sympathise with. He realised the truth of the statement, that a little knowledge was a very dangerous thing, and had it not been for the realisation of the presence of God, it is probable that the whole course of this history would have been altered. Still, his doubts did him no harm, nay, rather, they did him good, for out of his conquered doubts rose a stronger faith. And I am inclined to think that the men whose faith is strongest are those who at some time were sorely troubled, and who struggled and fought for truth, for that class of man will not believe mere hearsay, but only that which really appeals to them as true. Indeed, I think Jabez's condition may be described by some lines in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* :—

"He fought his doubts and gathered strength;
He would not make his judgments blind;
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them. Thus he came at length

"To find a stronger faith his own,
And power was with him in the night
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone."

CHAPTER XI.

"I'M NOT SATISFIED."

In the last chapter I have somewhat anticipated the events of the story, and in endeavouring to follow the course of the young minister's thoughts, have rapidly passed over the space of several months; but it will be necessary to return to the night on which Margaret and Jabez had walked home together from Moortown.

After Margaret had divested herself of her wrappings that night she came down to supper, but was strangely silent. Mr. Ashton and Reginald tried to rally her, but she was very quiet and subdued as though she wanted to be alone.

Miss Brooklyn, on the contrary, was full of fun, and was constantly causing mirth by her lively sallies. She had found Reginald Ashton a delightful companion, cheerful, while thoughtful, entertaining, although scorning to condescend to flippant talk: and the young lady had only one fault to find with their walk home, and that was, it was too short.

Bed-time came at last, however, and the two young ladies, who shared the same bedroom, went away together, and each of them sat down by the cheerful fire that was burning there as though they had no intention of retiring to rest.

For some time they were silent, until Miss Brooklyn burst out abruptly:

"Well, Queen Esther, how have you enjoyed the evening?"

"Queen Esther" was a name sometimes given to Margaret when at school, owing to her stately bearing and somewhat haughty demeanour.

"I don't know," replied Margaret, thoughtfully.

"Did you think the singing good?"

"Fairly so."

"And how did you enjoy your walk home?"

"I don't know," replied Margaret again.

"Well, I should know if I had to walk with that fellow How in the world you consented to go with him so willingly I cannot think."

Margaret was silent.

"What a stupid gawky he is, isn't he?" continued Miss Brooklyn.

"No, he's not," was the reply.

Hetty Brooklyn looked keenly at her, as though she wanted to see if Margaret were in earnest or not.

"Why, that is what you called him this very day, Margaret, before we met him on the hill; and that is why I thought you had been so quiet during the supper hour, for I felt sure you must have been bored."

"What do you think of him?"

"Well, did I not know you were such a good judge of character, I should have thought you were rather hard on him, because he appeared decently sharp with the gipsy. Still he is awkward and boorish; and, of course, he is soft, or he would not be a Methodist parson."

"He's not soft," said Margaret, thinking of their interview.

"What is the matter with you that you have altered your opinions so quickly?" asked Hetty, wonderingly.

Margaret did not reply.

"Anyone would think, if you were not going to marry Fred Warren, and if you did not hate ministers, that you were in love with this awkward rustic."

"Marry! love! Don't talk about such nonsense."

"Very well, my dear, I know you are not one of the sentimental sort, but still, you know, you will get married. Only a few months more, and Fred Warren will plead his cause again, and then you will be no longer Miss Ashton, but the mistress of one of the finest residences in the neighbourhood, and the wife of the young man whom all the girls are after."

"Never! No, I never will!"

"Margaret, what do you mean?"

"I shall never marry Fred Warren."

"Why? what has turned you against him?"

"Against him! I have nothing against him, I wish I had, for then my feelings would be justifiable."

"I do not at all understand you, Margaret."

"Well, I have nothing positive against Warren, because he is a negative character. If he were a villain, I might like him; or, better still, hate him; but one could as well hate a pug dog as him. If ever I am married, Hetty, I must have a man, one who can command me. Yes, one of whom I am sometimes afraid."

"You afraid, Margaret?"

"Yes, afraid. Not the paltry fear which is usually associated with the term afraid, but a quickening of the pulse at the sound of his footsteps, a tingling of my whole being when his hand touches mine. A reverential fear."

"And where is he to be found?"

"I scarcely know. The gawky parson, as you call him, is nearest my ideal."

"You are laughing at him."

"I am, and yet I am not. There is an undefinable power about him, and he has an unconscious knowledge of it. I know that the terms are contradictory, but they convey my meaning. I don't like him. I thought I despised

him ; but I don't. There is something about him that you can't despise."

"Margaret! Talking thus about a Methodist preacher, a despised Dissenter, an awkward clown!"

"A Methodist preacher! Yes ; you should hear him preach when he has a suitable theme. I heard him the first Sunday night he came. The sermon was an illogical hash. I told him so, and yet, I tell you, he held the congregation spell-bound, he thrilled us all. All his awkwardness left him, his eyes flashed fire, and his great frame seemed to quiver with emotion."

"Margaret, you are in love with him."

"I love, Hetty? I tell you no, I dislike him. And yet I admire him. I can't help it. His appearance is not prepossessing, his manner is stern even to rudeness. I think that's why I admire him. Other fellows fawn, whine and flatter. Easterbrook never does that, he seems to despise such things. He never makes nice speeches in the usual way, he never apes the society man."

"But then, Margaret, how can you admire a man who thinks as he does? How can you speak so of one who discards what we believe in?"

"There, there, Hetty, don't, please. Can you tell me what you believe in really? I know you can say what you don't believe in ; but if I were to ask you for the reasons of your non-belief you would be confused. It's all very easy to say, 'I don't believe in religion :' but the truth is, I don't think either of us knows what religion means. Come now, suppose we were to die to-night, what would become of us?"

"Become of us? Why, nothing. We should simply cease to be."

"What an ennobling thought. We eat, drink, sleep, think, feel, have strange, mysterious longings, and strugglings after higher things, and then we die, and all is nothing. Does that thought satisfy you, Hetty?"

"Have we not said a hundred times that we must take our chance with death? What is the use of talking about death?"

"But it must come. What is the meaning of life? Can these great longing souls of ours be simply the result of evolution; is there no deeper meaning in our heart throbs, than fifty or sixty years of existence?"

"You know, Margaret, that I have no interest in such talk. Go and ask this young minister, and he will be able to give utterance to a few worn-out platitudes."

"Laugh at that young minister, Hetty, but he has something which you have not, and which I have not. Life is far more to him than it is to you and me."

"Why, Margaret, what has come over you?"

"Come over me! I don't know. I disbelieve in his religion as much as ever I did, and to-night I came out with some strong statements. I told him I was a disbeliever in the Christian faith."

"And he, what did he say?"

"He tried to defend his belief."

"Well?"

"He succeeded badly. His arguments were unsound, he championed his cause in anything but a masterly way, until he seemed fairly mystified."

"And then?"

"He mystified me. The theologian was gone, and the man shone out. My arguments puzzled his brain, but his heart tossed them all to the winds, and although an outsider would say, in common parlance, that he had not a leg to stand on, I felt he was the conqueror."

"Nonsense, after you have had a sound sleep you will laugh at the idea of such a thing."

"You don't know him, or you would not talk like that. I stopped in the porch after he was gone, feeling as I never felt before. I had an unutterable longing after something

which I have never yet realised. I have it yet. What I want I do not know, but I know I want something, and it seems to me I shall never be happy until I find it."

"Nonsense, Margaret, don't talk such rubbish. I've got a splendid novel here. Read that, and you'll soon be all right. There, I'm not going to be serious any more," and the young lady settled herself before the fire and began to read.

Margaret, however, discarded the novel. She sat looking steadfastly into the fire, and seemed to be thinking deeply. Sometimes a far-away look came into her eyes, and her lips would quiver, and again she would move with a gesture of impatience.

By-and-bye, however, they both retired; but it was long ere sleep visited Margaret's eyelids, and when at last it did, she was troubled with strange dreams.

She fancied herself standing between two rivers. One was dark and muddy, and its waters turbulent, and as they moved, ghastly, weird forms were to be seen on the surface, and with strange gestures they invited her to come and join them. Over the river hung a hazy kind of mist, but she could see the dark waters stretching far away, and in the dim distance she fancied she saw a ghostly shore, and from the shore came awful wails and hideous cries.

The other river was indeed fair to look upon. Its waters flashed in a beautiful light, and they were as crystal. Floating on this river were graceful forms, which likewise beckoned her to join them. She looked as far as she could over its bright waters, and away in the distance she saw a lovely shore. After watching steadfastly, she saw beautiful forms dressed in white, which appeared to be walking beneath shady trees and among flowery beds. She likewise heard sweet music, like the music she had been taught as a child to believe was to be heard in the bowers of Eden. Then, looking at both of the rivers, she heard a splash on the dark river, and she saw Warren appear with a boat.

"This is the River of Time," he said. "Come and sail with me, come and sail to Eternity." And as he said this she saw the strange creatures on the river grin with fiendish glee.

"No, no," she said, "I cannot go. The waters are dark and turbid. I see an awful shore in the distance, and I would rather sail on the other river."

"You cannot sail on the other river. All the boats I could get would sink. Come and sail with me."

"Nay, do not go with him," said a voice near her, and turning around she saw Jabez Easterbrook. "That is the River of Death," he continued, "and this is the River of Life. Come and sail with me."

"They both lead to one place," cried Warren, "they are both the River of Time, and they both lead out to the great sea of Eternity."

"That river leads to death," cried Jabez, "and this to life."

And then in her dream she heard the creatures on the dark river crying "death," and the beautiful forms on the bright river crying "life." She tried to go to Jabez, but could not, some strange spell seemed to hold her back; and then she saw a beautiful maiden, with golden hair and large, lustrous, love-lit eyes, come to Jabez and say to him: "Take me to sail on the River of Life, on and on to the City of Life." And she saw that the maiden loved Jabez, but he did not yield to her request; he turned away from her, and said: "Margaret, I want *you* to come and sail with me. Come." But she could not come, her limbs refused to move.

Then she saw Jabez take the beautiful maiden in his arms and bear her to the boat, and they both got in together, and sailed away, singing as they went. As they sailed, another couple came down on the dark river, and they were singing, too, the same words that Jabez and his companion sung—

"Along the river of time we glide."

And then the words were indistinct, but by-and-bye she caught the refrain—

"Sailing on to Eternity."

The voices of Jabez and his companion were clear and sweet, but the other voices were harsh and discordant.

"Come, come," said Warren. "Come and sail with me, sail on the dark, cold waters, sail to the dark shore, sail to Eternity." And she seemed to be drawn to get into the boat, which was filled with loathsome creatures, when she heard Jabez's voice, strong and clear.

"Wait, I am coming to take you with me," it said.

Then she felt free, and said, joyfully:

"I am coming, Jabez." But Warren took hold of her arm, strange hissing noises were all around her, a great darkness fell, and then she awoke.

"What nonsense I have been dreaming," she thought; "but how real it seems, even now I fancy I can hear the refrain of their song, 'Sailing on to Eternity.'"

Again she fell asleep, but her dreams were indistinct, she seemed to pass through the same scene as before, but all was confused. Only one thing could she remember, and that was the song that was sung on the river. "We are all sailing," it said, "we can't help sailing, sailing on to Eternity."

When morning came she was tired, nervous, and unrefreshed; but she did not tell Hetty of her dreams, neither did she resume her conversation of the previous evening.

Several days passed away, and still Margaret was silent and thoughtful. She proved a poor companion for Hetty, but that young lady did not much mind. Reginald was pretty much at liberty, and as he seemed to enjoy her society, and paid her a fair amount of attention, she was quite content. Margaret was much alone, and she was constantly reading, as though trying to seek diversion or

help from books, but the sad, mournful look in her eyes showed that she had not been successful in her search.

Often the words of the young minister came to her mind "Your arguments do not satisfy the head, while they leave the heart untouched." And again and again she turned to the books in which she had pretended to find all she needed, as if thinking that she would still be satisfied by them.

"Why," she thought, "was not Comte satisfied with his Positivism? Why must he seek to make a religion, and institute a worship, which is so much inferior to that of my father and mother? Why is it that such a sad undertone runs through all, or nearly all George Eliot's books? and why is it that even in her "Choir Invisible" I feel something wanting? Her imagination was vivid, her insight into character keen, her genius wonderful, and yet her books are not satisfactory. Charlotte Brontë was an inferior woman, I should think, mentally, and yet her books are bracing and helpful, in spite of the deep pathos. George Eliot lost her faith in religion, Charlotte Brontë's faith was strong; does the reason lie there, I wonder? That young minister told me he had something in his heart that could answer all my objections, he told me he was going to seek for truth, but he was not afraid, for he should not be alone. Not alone, I wish I could say that. I do feel alone, and I am afraid to think. Oh! life is a terrible thing. So sad, so lonely, so hopeless! Life, what is it? A blot on a page, an hour-glass, a something, a nothing. What am I? From whence did I come, and whither shall I go? Surely I cannot die. But why am I thinking like this? I never did before, and now I cannot rest."

One day, Hetty, noticing that she looked pale, asked her to go for a drive, and Margaret consented. The horse which the groom harnessed for them was a young, skittish thing; but he did not think of any danger because Margaret was regarded as a perfect master of it

For the first mile or two of their drive, the horse behaved perfectly well; but after a while Margaret noticed that it seemed unwilling to go forward, as though it were afraid of something in the distance, and on looking she saw a gipsy tent fixed by the side of the road. It was not a pleasant or reassuring sight to a young, nervous horse; and it started fearfully as Margaret urged it forward; but it would doubtless have gone by in safety had not some ragged urchins at the moment they were passing come out with arms uplifted, and shouted with all their might. The animal was fearful before, but now it tore along with frightful speed, and Margaret soon found that her strength was almost useless, for it had taken the bit between its teeth.

She did not lose her presence of mind, however; with her lips firmly set, and her large eyes flashing, she sat firmly on the driver's seat, and held the reins with a steady hand. Not so Hetty. The instant she realised their danger she began to scream hysterically, which if possible frightened he horse more.

"Stop it, Margaret," she cried.

"I am doing all I can to stop it, Hetty, but it is almost impossible, for the bit is between his teeth. If I can stop it before it reaches the top of the hill, all will be well; if not, then I know not what may become of us, for the descent on the other side is almost as steep as the roof of a house, and at the bottom is a gully and a narrow bridge crossing it."

The horse dashed madly on, its speed somewhat checked in ascending the hill; but there was no probability of it stopping, and when they reached the summit they gave up hope, for it seemed determined to rush on, when a form leaped from the roadside, seized the bridle rein, and dragged the animal to its knees.

Instantly both girls got out of the conveyance, thankful to have escaped without hurt, and looking at their deliverer, Margaret recognised him as none other than Jack Brag.

"Whoa, stond steady you," cried Jack, speaking to the horse, and then turning to the young ladies said, "I wur only just i' time, but, thank God, it's all reeght."

"It was very brave of you," cried Margaret, "and I don't know how to thank you enough."

"I want noan o' your thanks, miss," cried Jack. "I did jist what ony man who is a man ud do."

"But think of the danger, were you not afraid?"

"Nay, nay," said Jack, "there's noan so mich danger i' the path o' duty. And surely sin there's One who done so mich for us, we ought to do all t' gooid we can for one another."

"Who has done so much for you?" said Margaret, a little mystified.

"Don't you know?" said Jack. "Why, it's Jesus Christ. He's made a new mon o' me. He's gi'en me strength to feight agin wrong. It's a new spirit I've got inside."

"I've heard that you have been in the habit of going to chapel since Mr. Easterbrook came," said Margaret.

"Ay, I have, and if ever there wur a true mon on God's earth, 'tis he. He took hod o' me, miss, on a neet as you can perhaps remember, and he made me feel I wur a mon, an' although he said nowt about religion, he made me feel as though God loved me. He's stuck to me like a brother sin'; and helped me to conquer t' drink, and Sunday week at neet when he were praichin' he talked straight to me. I'd bin gitten better by littles but I wur noan reight, and he talked to me reight from his heart, and now, thank God, aw'm a new mon, and I bless the day as sent Measther Easterbrook to Heathertown."

Tears came into Jack's eyes as he spoke, and trickled down his black face—he had just come from the coal-pit—and there was a look in his eyes which showed that he felt what he said.

Hetty Brooklyn took a sovereign from her purse and offered it him as a reward for his kindness and bravery.

"Nay, miss," cried Jack, standing back, "I couldn't tak' owt, I sudden hold up my head agean for a bit if I did; don't thank me, miss, thank God."

"How do you know there is a God?" said Hetty somewhat sneeringly, for she was annoyed that Jack would not take her money.

Jack looked at her in astonishment, and even Margaret was annoyed at such a question. Somehow, she felt, although she knew not why, that some unseen power had saved them from death.

"Wust a shake honds, lass?" he said at last.

"Certainly," cried Hetty, putting out her hand.

"Well then," said Jack, taking her hand, "aw'm as sure there's a God as aw'm sure I shake thy hond. I feel thy hond wi' my hond, and I feel God i' my heart. Good afternoon to ye both," and Jack strode away.

By this time the horse was quite quiet, and they drove home in safety, but when they were driving up to the house, Margaret said to Hetty—

"Where should we be by this time if Jack Brag had not stopped the horse?"

"I don't know," said Hetty a little sullenly.

"I tell you," said Margaret, "there's something wrong somewhere; life should be more than—than,—Hetty, I'm not satisfied."

CHAPTER XII.

MARGARET AND JABEZ.

When nearly a year had passed since the Saturday evening on which our story opens, Jabez Easterbrook tried to take a retrospective view of the time he had been in Heathertown, and to see what progress he had made, what progress the church had made, and what changes had taken place in his life generally. As far as the church was concerned, he found that it had indeed been marching onward. It numbered nearly 100 members more than it had done the year before. Many of the young men who had not been in the habit of attending the House of Prayer, but most of whom had spent their time at the public-house drinking, or in the alley playing at pitch and toss, had become reformed characters, and were now ardent members of the church. Then, too, those who had previously been mere nominal members had become real. The young minister's preaching and teaching had led them to see that religion was a practical thing, and did not consist in mere name or sentiment. They had seemed to have the idea that it was simply believing in something done for them, but they had been led to see that it meant a power within, enabling them to fight against wrong and to conquer sin. During the last month or two of his ministry little or nothing had been said in the village about the inconsistency of church members, and the spirit of unity and love seemed to reign in their midst.

With regard to his own intellectual life, he found that a great change had taken place and was even now going on. It had come over him in spite of himself, he had often during the first few months of his ministry struggled against it, but the force of events had led him on and on, until he seemed to live a new mental life.

His faith in God and the religion of Christ was not shaken, however, nay, it was stronger than ever. It was stronger because he had been led out of many of the mists and fogs of prejudice, out of bigotry and narrow, comfortless creeds, into the clear sunshine of God's love and truth, and living there, his heart throbbed with the new life it gave him, and his soul rejoiced more than ever in the good God and Father of all men.

There was one matter, however, that caused him serious doubts and gave him many hours of earnest thought. It was this. He found that he had feelings towards Margaret Ashton different to those he had ever felt towards anyone before. The knowledge of it had come upon him slowly. When he first knew her he regarded her with feelings almost amounting to dislike. She had treated him with anything but kindness. She had on several occasions been rude, and had intentionally wounded his feelings. She had held up his teaching to public ridicule, or had tried to do so. She had seemed to take delight in showing how little she thought of him. He had never walked alone with her but once, and then she had stated plainly that she did not believe in his religion, the religion on which he had staked everything and in which lay all his hopes.

He had occasionally met her in the village street, or when he had been walking in the country lanes, but she never noticed him save by a simple "good-day" if she were walking, or if she were on horseback by a haughty inclination of the head. Yet he felt that he loved her with a love that was strengthening day by day.

Certainly there had been nothing by which one might think his love would be fed. She was nothing like what he had conceived as an ideal of womanhood. Like other lads he had dreamed of what his love was to be. He fancied a sweet, blue-eyed maiden, with golden or auburn hair and a tender, sensitive-looking mouth. He had thought of one who would be small and fairy-like, and who with her winsome ways and loving attention would charm all care away One who would sing to him when he was lonely and sad, songs of love and beauty, songs of the home for which they would both be praying, hoping and believing. It was a beautiful picture he had drawn of the sweet girl he was to love, but he had never met her, and now he found that he loved one far different to the one of whom he had conceived.

There was, as far as he knew, nothing fairy-like about Margaret. He had seen no winsome ways, nothing that would indicate loving attention. She was haughty, proud, and stern. True, she did appear to be affectionate to her parents and to her brother, but to those outside that small circle she appeared almost destitute of love.

All these thoughts passed through the young minister's mind as he sauntered up and down the garden one Saturday afternoon, nearly a year after he had first seen her. He had been trying to think of his sermons for the following day, but somehow or other his thoughts refused to come, and he could not concentrate his mind on the discourses which he had been studying and writing through the week. And so he threw himself under the shadow of a tree and allowed himself to be carried away by his fancies. The wind played with the leaves overhead, and sighed its way gently through the shrubs which grew around in great profusion, while thousands of invisible flies made a dreamy kind of music, which, as it mingled with the gentle sighing of the wind, seemed to make his fancies and dreams real.

"Why is it," he mused, "why is her presence ever with me? Why do I ever feel her spirit near me, when I know by her every look and action that she dislikes me? Why am I ever thinking of one who is engaged to another? Nay, I do not believe she is. Such a girl as Margaret Ashton could never consent to spend her life with a man like Warren. And yet it is commonly reported that they are engaged. Well, it does not matter to me whether she is or no, she can never be anything to me. But why am I ever thinking of her? Why can I not rid my mind of this haughty, proud girl, who has ever treated me with anything but courtesy? I feel my life is gone out into her life, and without her I am a lost man.

"Did God intend it, I wonder? Is it His will that I should love this lady who cares nothing for me, who in point of position and wealth is far above me, and above all who professes entire disbelief in the religion of Christ?

"Oh, I do love her, I do love her! But is it right? Ought I to set my affection on one who has no faith in my Master's name, and who scorns my faith? 'Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,' said St. Paul. There is not much danger of my being yoked to her, even if I dared to ask her, but the sin, if it be a sin, is just as great, for I feel I love one who does not love Christ."

This thought loomed up before the young man like a dark and angry cloud, and his brave soul quailed. Love an infidel! Yes, she was practically one, and it could not be right for one who professed to give up his life for Christ's work to pour out the wealth of his heart at the feet of one who laughed his faith to scorn.

And yet there was something grand about her. Her unbelief was unlike the coarse, sensual scepticism which he had seen among the village orators. To him there was something almost sublime in her keen intellect and her wide culture. There was something grand about her hatred

She hated nothing but meanness and lies, and she loved what she conceived to be true and right; but, and it was a terrible "but," she did not believe in the Christian faith.

"I must fight this down," he said to himself, "and yet why should I? I have not sought her society, I have done nothing to encourage the feeling I have. Who put this love in my heart? Was it a good or an evil power? It could not be an evil power that put such a pure love in my soul as I bear for Margaret Ashton, and although she is an unbeliever, every fibre in my being tells me she is pure, in word, and thought, and deed. Did God give me this love then? If so, why should I seek to crush it?"

The young man rose to his feet, strode out of the garden, and away into the fields, until he got into the path where he had walked on the night when he first saw the subject of his thoughts.

"I must crush it, though," he continued, "I must kill it if I can, for even if she were a Christian, there would be as little hope for me, for she dislikes me, and is engaged, by all accounts, to be married to another man."

With this thought in his mind he went on, until he came to the gully out of which he had helped Jack Brag nearly a year before, and having looked down, and watched the limpid brooklet as it rippled over its sandy bed, he went down the valley where some tall, dark fir-trees waved their spiral tops as the wind played through their prickly foliage. He did not enter the plantation, although there was a foot-path through it, but he sat down near the beck, and listened as it murmured its way through the valley down to the river which lay in the distance. What delicious music it made to him, and how restful and quiet everything was He watched the waters as they flashed in the sunlight, and went on and on, never stopping; as if to tell him of their similarity to his own life. They soothed his agitated feelings, and calmed his mind, for they seemed to tell him of

the beauty and joy of some distant land where all was peace and quiet, and where dark doubts and terrible struggles should never be.

He had sat some time musing quietly, when he heard the rustling of the grass near to the spot where he lay, and on looking up he saw the one of whom he had been thinking, the one whom he longed, yet dreaded to see.

He rose to his feet immediately, and held out his hand.

"I am glad to see you, Miss Ashton," he said.

"Thank you," she replied, "but I had begun to think you had altogether forsaken our house. You have not been for months."

She seemed to speak frankly, and yet Jabez fancied he detected sadness in her voice.

"No," he said, thoughtfully, "I have not been to see anyone, except the sick, and those whom I thought a friendly visit might do good. I have had much on my mind."

"You do not look as strong as you did a year ago," she said quietly; "you look weary, and pale, as though you wanted rest."

Jabez looked at the queenly maiden before him. What a wealth of beauty she possessed. How her dark eyes flashed, and how expressive was every feature of her face. Was it a wonder that he loved her? But he must not think thus, he must destroy this feeling which could end in no good.

"I have been resting," he said, "I have been watching, and listening to the beck here, and it has made beautiful music as it mingled with the sighing wind."

"Yes, it is very beautiful," she replied. "I have often come here alone, and I have seemed to live my life over again while I have been here. But I am afraid it does us but little good; life is practical, or should be. There are

many struggles, many pains, and the cooing of the gentle winds only lures one away from duty."

"I do not think so. I know the thoughts which have passed through my mind have helped me, and although I have my sorrows and cares, as I suppose every one has, yet I can rejoice in the life which I live, and I have hope in the great future."

"And I feel," she said, "as though life is but a black blot on a clean page, that it is indeed a terrible thing. I feel sometimes with those German Pessimists, that if we could by one mighty shock become extinct, so much would it be the better for us."

"And I feel that God is in the world, and that in His infinite love He will do all things well."

By mutual consent they had come back to their conversation of months before, but Margaret felt that the man who spoke to her now, and the one who spoke on the stormy night when they were coming from Moortown, were vastly different. Still her old desire to confuse him came back to her, and the old sarcastic smile came to her lips.

"Don't talk to me of God, Mr. Easterbrook," she said, somewhat passionately. "I see too much pain and suffering to believe in such a God as you preach. I have just come from a cottage house, the house of one of my father's workmen, and there lies a deformed child. She has never been able to go out into the sunshine, indeed, she could never walk, and there she lies day after day, night after night, on a hard couch, without joy or happiness. Could such a God as you believe in, let poor little Nellie Scott live such a life?"

"He does."

"Then I can't believe in Him."

"Miss Ashton," he said, "this morning I went to John Scott's cottage, and as I entered the door, I heard a childish voice singing—

'Jesu, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,'

and I found that little Nellie was the singer.

"'Do you love Jesus, Nellie?' I asked.

"'Yes, sir, I do,' she said, in her sweet, childish way, and I saw tears standing in her eyes.

"'And are you happy, Nellie?'

"'So happy, sir. Why, although I am often singing "let me to Thy bosom fly," I feel I am resting all the day long in His arms, just like one of the lambs that we see in the picture.'

"'And should you not like to be able to romp around with the other children, and play in the sunshine?' I asked.

"Then a thoughtful look settled on her face, and she said:—

"'I used to do, sir, very much, but now I don't think I do. I am company for mother, you know, sir, and oh, such beautiful thoughts come to me sometimes, about Heaven, and the angels singing, that I am almost glad I am not strong like Jim and Sally, for I asked them whether they ever thought about the things that I do, and they laughed, and said they didn't know what I meant, and then I was glad that I could lie here alone and think.'

"I came away soon afterwards, Miss Ashton, but I did not think God cruel to make little Nellie like she is."

"But, Mr. Easterbrook—"

"Just another word. When I left the house, and got into the highway, I saw a man, and he was as perfectly made as I think I ever saw anyone; but he had the gleam of a devil in his eye, and he was cruelly beating a poor little dog that had in some way offended him. I compared the two, and I came to the conclusion that a beautiful spirit is infinitely better than a perfect body."

Margaret was silent for a minute, and then she said:—

"But why did your God allow the man to have evil passions?"

"I think it useless for us to speculate on such questions as that," he replied; "still freedom is essential to a moral nature, and if God forced the man to be anything, there would no longer be virtue in his actions."

They had wandered into the plantation, and were walking, side by side, down by the rippling beck.

"You told me you intended making a study of those questions that we talked about when coming home from Moortown. I have heard that there is a marked change in your preaching. I suppose you have done what you said you would?"

"I don't know as to that. I have been trying to read and think. I have read Comte's *Positivism*, and Von Hartmann's *Pessimism*, and a few other books bearing on the subjects you spoke about."

"Well?"

"Well, they have strengthened my faith in the God of my fathers. Comte was obliged to have a religion, in spite of all his arguments against it, while those Pessimists lived in direct opposition to their teaching, and it was no wonder, for a more miserable creed was never invented."

"And you really believe in the Christian religion after reading those books?" she said, and there seemed to be a longing look in her eyes.

"They made me feel as I think little Nellie Scott must have felt when she sang, 'Jesu, lover of my soul.'"

"But, Mr. Easterbrook, can you really reconcile religious beliefs with scientific teachings?"

"I have seen nothing yet, Miss Ashton, but what strengthens my belief in God and His Christ. Indeed, He was never as real as He is to-day."

Somehow she could not argue with him now, as she could a few months before. He seemed to have the con-

sciousness of what he said in his own heart, and his words were filled with a meaning which did not exist then.

Still she asked another question.

"But, Mr. Easterbrook," she said, "can you say that this is not a sorrowful world? Have you no sorrows? Do you not long to escape them and be at rest?"

There was a pleading look in her eyes, different to her old expression of defiance, as though she longed for some comforting answer, as though she were tired of her unbelief.

"Yes," he replied slowly, "this is a sorrowful world. I have my sorrows, sometimes I have longed to escape and be at rest."

Their eyes met as he answered her, and she caught the look which he gave her, a look which set her heart throbbing wildly.

Could it be, she thought, that this man had given his love to her; could it be that she had won his heart? She drove the fancy from her mind as soon as she could, and then spoke again.

"Then what is the use of your religion, Mr. Easterbrook?"

For a minute he was unable to reply. His great love for her burned in his heart and struggled for expression. How sweet it would be if he could forget all but this beautiful maiden, and spend his happy life with her. But no, she was an unbeliever, even now she was urging arguments against his religion, and he must not think of it.

"My religion is all I have," he said, "take away that and you take away my every hope. Life without it would be vain. I know there are sorrows, I know that I am weak, but I have God."

"No hope in life but in your religion," she said, "have you no friends, no earthly hopes?"

"That which I would hope for, I dare not," he said, "what would be to me more than all else, if I could get it

is beyond me. Everything bars the way, everything keeps me from possessing the greatest desire of this life, circumstances forbid, conscience forbids."

"But all the hindrances may be taken away," she said, "and what now seems insurmountable may prove easy, and then—"

"Miss Ashton, it cannot be, do not talk of it any more, please; nevertheless, I am happy, for although my earthly hopes are dashed aside, I have a safe abiding place."

She felt sure she knew his secret. How she liked to hear this strong man talk. For a moment a mean desire came into her soul. How she would like to play with his affections!

"And do you never intend to try to overcome the difficulties that stand in the way of your earthly happiness?" she asked.

"Never!" he said, sternly, for he was fighting even now a terrible battle.

"Does your religion keep you from it?" she asked again, as though determined to give him pain.

"Yes."

"Then your religion asks you to give up the happiness of the life you are sure about for the happiness of a world or of a life which may only exist in the land of dreams?"

"Miss Ashton, I have not sought to know much of your inner life, but I should like to ask you a question now, may I?"

"Certainly," replied Margaret.

"Are you satisfied without religion?"

She expected another question, what, she scarcely knew, but something connected with the young minister's sorrow she hoped, and to tell the truth, she was a little disappointed, and, perhaps, because of the disappointment, and because of the unexpectedness of the question, she did not evade it, but answered in a straightforward manner.

"No," she said, "I am not."

"No," he replied, "I know you are not, and you never will be. Miss Ashton, I will trouble you with my society no longer."

He strode away, his heart throbbing loudly. "O, God, help me, for Christ's sake, help me!" he prayed, "for this is hard to bear; but I will bear it, and by Thy help I will be true." He did not stop until he had gone through several meadows, and then he threw himself beneath the leafy branches of a large spreading tree, and lay with his face towards the ground. He looked nearly motionless; but none but himself and God knew of the battle he fought that day.

CHAPTER XIII.

NOTHING SATISFIES BUT GOD.

To say that Margaret was surprised at Easterbrook's behaviour would but faintly express her feelings. He had gone away without a minute's warning, had strode through the plantation as though he were fearful lest some terrible calamity were following him, and had left her alone. Never could she remember being treated so before. Gentlemen had always appeared to be too fond of her society to leave her so; but this man, of whom she had often spoken sneeringly, had been rude to her, had left her as though he were tired of her presence. He had left her, too, with words which were anything but pleasing ringing in her ears. She did not believe in religion: but he had told her she would never be happy, never be satisfied without it, and the thought was anything but comforting.

Her feelings towards Easterbrook at this time were by no means favourable; she had begun to like him during the last few months, although she had seen so little of him; but now, after his rude behaviour, he had forfeited all rights to favour, and yet she could not help admiring this stern, resolute, manly man. She would not admit, even to herself, that the admiration existed, yet it did exist, and she went home in no enviable mood.

After tea, she walked on the lawn alone, and thought of their conversation together, especially of the part where he

told her that conscience and circumstances hindered him from obtaining what he would love to hope for.

"Can it be that?" she murmured; "if so, I would like to test him, ay, I would like to lead him on to a declaration of love, and then laugh at him. Nay, I would not. He's not a man one can laugh at. He's not one that I could lead on in such a way. And if I did, what then, what should I be the better? Somehow, his very presence gives me a hatred for things that are mean and small, even while I desire them, and his true words and sincere tones give me a longing in spite of myself for things that are true and good."

Her mind wandered back over the past twelve months. "My feelings and thoughts have certainly changed during the year," she mused; "then, I did not think about the things which are now troubling me so. Then, I thought I was satisfied with my life, and content to let the future care for itself, while now my heart is constantly longing for something which I have not got. Hetty Brooklyn seems content to live her frivolous life; she wrote to me last week that she was having a happy time down in Wales, because they were having beautiful weather and pleasant company. Yes, I expect there is some flirtation proceeding, for Hetty can always be happy if she can have some one to flirt with. I thought once that Reginald would have been smitten by Hetty, but it seems otherwise. Well, she has no religion; she's not so wealthy, and people say not so handsome as I, and yet life is so sad and dreary to me.

"I ought to be happy. I have a good home, and may, if I will, have a position in the neighbourhood which will be second to none, but I could never be happy then.

"I thought I liked Fred Warren once, and now I despise him. Why, why is it that all is changed? I long for something which I cannot put into words. Life is small, so small, and I feel that somewhere there is a larger, grander life, if I

could only find it. Religion, Easterbrook says, is his hope, but what is religion? Doing right, isn't it? Well, I try and do right, and yet— I feel somehow as though I longed for wings that I might fly away into a clearer sky. Bessie Roberts has religion, she says; she goes to early Communion, she fasts, she attends all the rites which the High Church school demands, and yet I never met with a more miserable, peevish, narrow-souled girl than she. Well, she has religion, and if I had it should I be the better?

"That fellow always makes me uncomfortable when I talk to him, and yet he seems to do me good. Perhaps, though, it's only because I feel he is my master. My master! yes, he is. I instinctively feel it. I felt it twelve months ago, when he dressed like an awkward clown, and when his thoughts were crude and narrow, and I feel it tenfold more now.

"What a grand thing it is to be a strong, clear-headed man; there seems to be an indescribable power about them, they seem so self-sufficient; and yet Easterbrook says that all his hopes are centred in his religion. I wonder now if ——well, I have not been to chapel for a long time, I'll go to-morrow night and hear what he has to say."

With that thought in her mind, Margaret went indoors, and soon after her rich, clear voice rang through the house as she sang a solo from *The Messiah*. Did those beautiful words, set to such grand music, have no effect on her soul?

"I know that my Redeemer liveth,"

she sang, and as she did so she seemed to feel that somewhere the One of Whom she sang did live. It was a vague thought, 'tis true; nevertheless, it set her thinking more definitely, but neither light nor comfort seemed to come.

"Margaret," said her father, coming into the room, "I want to talk with you."

"Yes, papa."

"Well, we have not been away for a change this summer as yet, and I think we ought to think of going soon."

"And where do you think of going?"

"We have not been to the English Lakes yet, so I have thought, if it is agreeable to you, we will go to Windermere; what do you say to it?"

"The very place to which I should like to go most. Papa, you are really good to think of it, and we, that is, you and I, will have some glorious times hill climbing."

"But, Margaret, I am going to put your faith in my goodness to the test. I am going to ask you to consent to that which will very likely cost you some sacrifice of pleasure."

"You are? Well, what is it?"

"Why, Margaret, it's this. Mr. Easterbrook, in my opinion, looks far from well. He has been working very hard of late, and although a few weeks ago he went to his home for a little rest, he looks as though two or three weeks among the Cumberland and Westmoreland hills would do him a world of good. So I have decided, if you are willing, to ask him to go with us. What do you say? I know you are not over partial to him; but do you not think you could bury your hostile feelings, and consent for him to be a member of our party, although you may not wish to give him much of your society?"

"He thinks I am hostile towards Easterbrook, does he?" thought she; "well, perhaps I am; but never mind, he is capital company, and I shall enjoy myself more rather than less because of him. And yet it will be a nuisance to have a man of his stamp always around, for he will be sure to be as stern and as solemn as a judge.

"Oh, I don't mind, papa," she said, aloud, "only, of course, I shall not be expected to be very polite to him?"

"Well, seeing he is to be our guest, I hope you will try

and make his visit as pleasant as you can. However, I'll leave that to you, and now I'll go and write about rooms at 'The Hydropathic.'"

After he had gone, Margaret sat a long time thinking, and by the look on her face, her thoughts were by no means unpleasant, for now and then a merry smile played around her lips, and mirth danced in her bright, dark eyes.

"It would be fun if I did," she mused; "I should like to see him made humble for once. It would be a triumph if I could get him to beseech and implore for my love. And yet I should not like him to do it. I admire him now, in spite of my dislike for him, but then I should despise and dislike him as well."

The next day, about four o'clock, she was somewhat surprised to see Easterbrook come to the house with her father, but was not at all displeased, nevertheless, as she wanted to know whether he had accepted her father's invitation to go with them to Windermere. She watched him closely, too, to see if possible whether her suspicions of the previous day were confirmed by his behaviour; but he was perfectly cool and self-possessed. He shook hands with her in the most matter-of-fact way, and appeared in no way nervous or confused. Margaret was disappointed; she had hoped to see his lips quiver, and to give other signs that she had him under her control.

"I am happy to tell you, Margaret, that Mr. Easterbrook has consented to become our guest during our visit to Windermere, on condition that he can get his pulpit supplied, and as I see no difficulty in doing that, we may take it for granted that we start on Tuesday," said Mr. Ashton.

"So soon, papa?"

"Yes, surely you don't want a week in order to get ready, and I am sure Mr. Easterbrook ought to be glad to go at once."

"Oh, don't think I complain," she said; "on the other hand, I am longing to be off."

Perhaps if she had known through what she would have to pass during her visit there she might not have been so anxious to start so soon.

Jabez was rather silent during tea-time, and afterwards asked leave to have a few minutes of quiet study before starting for the evening service.

"Yes," said Margaret, laughingly, as he left the room, "and I hope your sermon is carefully prepared, for I am going to be an unmerciful critic to-night."

"Pray, don't," said Jabez, speaking in the same tone of banter, and then speaking seriously, said, "Nay, Miss Ashton, just listen for the sake of the message for once. Listen, if you can, with an unprejudiced mind," and Margaret determined that for once she would.

When she reached the chapel, she found it full in every part, and when a minute afterwards the young minister came out of the vestry and entered the rostrum she felt that it was no mean position that he occupied, for the man who could draw a thousand people to hear the message he had to deliver could have no mean influence or power.

She realised, too, an influence hitherto unfelt during the opening part of the service, and when at last Easterbrook stood up to give out the text, and a deep hush rested upon the congregation, her eyes were attracted towards the preacher as though he were a magnet.

"My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God," were the words he read clearly and distinctly, and then he went on to speak about them.

He commenced by saying that every man had naturally a religious feeling, a longing for God. The ideas of some concerning Him were very vague and crude, but, nevertheless, they existed in the breast of every man. Sir John Lubbock had taken upon himself the task of trying to prove that there were in the world tribes of atheists, that there were human beings in the world who never had a thought

of or longing for God; but the very instances which he adduced clearly proved what he had been trying to disprove. Every human being, he said, wanted a God, and only He could satisfy them. There were, however, those who taught that the existence of God was not necessary, either to the mind or heart, that there was enough in life, enough in what we saw around us every day to satisfy our utmost longings. That was the subject on which he wished to speak. Take, first of all, a view which had been lately propagated under the name of Æstheticism. Some taught that the human soul could be satisfied by beauty in nature, that in realising and feeling the tints of leaf, and tree, and flower, the heart could rest. He would not deprecate the love for beauty in nature; he could not, for he loved beautiful things himself; but could they satisfy the great longings of the soul? The writer of the Psalm from which he had taken the text could not be a stranger to the beautiful in nature; all the glories of the land "which flowed with milk and honey" were open to his gaze, and yet David, who had a poet's soul, cried, "My soul thirsteth for God."

"I remember," he said, "years ago, that near my home, among the hills of Cornwall, I stood and looked at what Wordsworth would have loved to describe. I was on the brow of a hill, and looked down on what is the most beautiful valley I ever saw. Running down it, winding its way among the green meadows was a river, clear as crystal, its water sparkling like diamonds. The woods which sloped up on either side of the valley were in the glory of their summer foliage, and as in the gentle evening breeze the trees waved their feathery tops towards the sky, they made a murmuring sound which to me seemed as sweet as the music of angels. As the sound blended with the rippling waters beneath, I seemed to hear the echo of a thousand voices singing in the distance. The sun was setting behind the western hill, the sky was flooded with glory, and a

light, thin mist rose from the river, until the whole valley was filled, and as the setting sun shone through it, the valley seemed some wondrous fairy land. I stood enraptured. 'Beautiful! beautiful!' I exclaimed, for I had seen one of earth's fairest sights. Was I satisfied? Here was what would have delighted a Turner, or a Wordsworth, in their love for the beautiful; but I was not satisfied. Material beauty could not satisfy spiritual longings; nature decked in all its grandeur only led me back to nature's God, and, like David, my soul thirsted for God, for the living God."

By this time every eye in the congregation was fixed on him, and the people were led to see with his eyes.

"Then, again, there were the attractions of wealth and power. The writer of the text occupied no mean position. As king of Israel, his power was almost absolute, while the wealth of the land was at his command. He was renowned as a warrior and as a king, and yet his cry was, 'My soul thirsteth for God.' Wealth and power did not satisfy.

"And yet," he said, "how many are yearning after this, as though in it was all they would need. Young men, full of zeal, ambition, and enterprise, are aiming to get wealth, influence, and power; all their energy is concentrated on getting what they think is the one thing in life. They get it; are they satisfied? I do not condemn enterprise in business, but let us remember that we may amass the wealth of Rothschild and yet not have what we want. Men by indomitable courage and perseverance have carved their way from the lowest to the highest positions; from the shy, awkward boy they have taken their place among the foremost in the busy mart or exchange, until their voice has been almost a guide to the commercial world in which they had lived. The power they have gained has been so great that they could by one fell stroke stagger the enterprise and success of thousands. Their life and power have, no doubt, been absorbing, but do their wealth and power satisfy?"

With eloquent, burning words he described men who possessed vast wealth and great power, and who were yet miserable in the highest degree, and whose lives were hollow, joyless shams.

"These souls of ours," said he, "cannot be satisfied with earthly wealth, or earthly powers; they want more, they want God."

He referred to the attraction of literature and music, and admitted the wondrous influence that was realised when beneath their spell, but was this enough in the labyrinth of learning, the deep fascination, and the spell of the master writer's hand to appease the thirst of a longing soul? Was there enough in music, possessing as it did such wondrous power, to make us feel that this was enough? He touched upon the lives of great thinkers, teachers, and musicians, and showed from their own statements that all their art was but a means to an end, it was only valuable in the true sense of the word, in so far as it led the soul up to God. He referred to writers of wondrous power, but who had lost their faith in God, and showed from their words that life to them was a sad thing. He would not deprecate culture or music, he had enjoyed both to a certain extent. He had read some of the best books that had been written, he had listened to some beautiful singing, but in themselves they possessed no satisfying power, they only made the soul long for something which it did not possess. And why? Why was it that the soul could not be satisfied with Nature luxuriant with beauty, with commerce, possessing, as it did, its power of exciting and alluring; literature and music, with their charm and sweetness? Because there was a divinity in the soul that longed for the Divine, a spirit in man which longed for the parent spirit; the heart throbbed, the soul yearned, the whole nature thirsted for God. He alone could satisfy our highest desires, and all history had repeated the words of

the Psalmist; and all nature re-echoed the words, "My soul thirsteth for God."

I cannot give the appeal he made; it could not be placed on paper. No words of mine could convey the tone, the feeling with which he made it. I only know from what I have been told since, that both preacher and people seemed to be wondrously moved, how that Jabez, with pleading, passionate words, sought to lead them from the bare, blank materialism of life to the bosom of a loving God, Who thirsteth for them. And I know this, too, that when the words of the preacher died away, and the organist began to play the tune that was usually sung to "Jesus, lover of my soul," Margaret Ashton's face was pale as death, and her great dark eyes were dim with the moisture that had gathered.

After the service, Jabez, according to his promise which he had made to Mr. Ashton in the afternoon, walked home with them, and as he stopped to close the gate, which stood open against the highway, Margaret waited too, and they walked side by side up to the house.

"Did you experience your sermon of to-night, Mr. Easterbrook?" she asked.

"I don't understand," he said.

"No, I suppose not; I have expressed my meaning badly. What I meant to say was, have you in past years experienced in your own life what you have to-night expressed?"

"Yes, very often."

"Do you love nature?"

"Very much."

"Did you long for wealth and power, did you try and find satisfaction in literature and music?"

"I do not know that I longed for wealth; but for influence, I did. As for books and music, I loved, and do love, both very much."

"But you did not really find what you wanted in them?"

"Never."

"Pardon me for asking, but your sermon was not of the usual kind which I have been accustomed to hear. Have you really found satisfaction? Have your soul's thirstings been quenched?"

"The day I found God I found satisfaction."

"Then you realise God in your soul now?"

"I know I am saying much, but I do."

"This is a serious matter, Mr. Easterbrook; but do you desire anything else? Is there any earthly thing you desire?"

Jabez was silent.

"You said to-night that all fulness dwelt in God. If that is so, and you have found God, you can desire nothing else?"

Still he did not speak.

"Come, come, Mr. Easterbrook, be true to your teaching; you have found God, and yet by your silence I conclude that God does not satisfy."

"But God does satisfy. I know that in our waywardness we sometimes desire what perhaps would be a curse rather than a blessing, and because God does not give it to us we feel ready to murmur, and yet beneath all surface feelings there is a deep abiding satisfaction which no power can destroy."

Again Margaret was disappointed. And yet for an indefinable reason she was glad that he had answered as he had done, and she felt he spoke what he himself realised.

"Miss Ashton," he continued, "you have told me you do not believe in God; some months ago you almost intimated that you did not want God. But I tell you this again, nothing satisfies but God, and He does satisfy the deepest longings of the soul."

Those words rang in Margaret's ears that night as she lay

alone and thought. Her heart was hard, and her nature was not much awakened, but she felt that she did long for something which she did not possess ; her faith in God was so small that it could scarcely be called faith at all, and yet she kept on repeating the words of the young minister, "Nothing satisfies but God."

CHAPTER XIV.

WINDERMERE.

Mr. and Mrs. Ashton, Reginald, and Margaret, together with Jabez Easterbrook, arrived at Windermere on Tuesday evening about seven o'clock, and as they were driven from the station to The Hydropathic, Jabez felt that he was indeed coming into a veritable paradise. When they had left Heathertown the air was hot and sultry, and the smoke which was belched forth from the chimneys of the mills made everything dark and unattractive. But now the air, while warm, was so clear and bracing that he did not notice the heat, and the glorious hills which towered in the distance seemed to him full of strange beauty. Everything, moreover, was so restful, so quiet. There was no whirr of machinery, no clatter of clogs, no hoarse shouts, it was just as it should be, when one comes away from noise and smoke to find rest and quiet. On their way to the hotel they passed a party of tourists. Stalwart-looking young fellows they were, with their knapsacks on their backs, and their sunburnt faces indicating health and vigour and happiness too, and Jabez felt that our physical condition has much to do with our happiness in life.

He had enjoyed the journey exceedingly. They had had a carriage reserved for them from Sowerby Bridge, and Margaret had been wondrously kind to him. Never before had he seen her so kind, so womanly. Hitherto she had

appeared to him as some grand creature, beautiful in appearance, powerful in intellect, but destitute of those qualities which he had always regarded as essential to true womanhood. To-day, however, she had been all that could be desired, and although he felt miserable at the thought of his hopeless affection, yet he realised a strange kind of joy as he talked with her. After they had left Preston, too, he saw how she enjoyed the scenery, saw how her eyes glistened and how expressive her face became as she saw a patch of wood, a fine stretch of country, or some wooded dell where the birds loved to sing and where a limpid brook babbled; and a yearning came into his soul that she might be led to find faith in the great Creator of all beauty.

She scarcely spoke to him, or indeed to anyone, as they rode from the station to the hotel; she seemed enraptured with what she saw, and in her eyes gleamed a strange light, as though she contemplated some wondrous enjoyment.

When the twilight gathered, Jabez and Reginald strolled away together down to the lake-side. They heard with pleasure the musical splash of the oars out on the lake, and listened to the songs which were wafted across the still waters.

"Is this not a glorious spot, Easterbrook?" said Reginald.

"You are right," replied Jabez, "it is; let us walk down through yon little wood; there seems to be a footpath through it. It must be grand to lie here in the shade while the lake ripples at your feet. My word, Reginald, this place seems like Heaven."

They had entered the little wood, and here and there the footpath touched the edge of the lake, and as they wandered along they saw a small boat lying near the shore, and seated in it was a young girl. Her long, golden-brown hair rippled in wavy masses over her neck and shoulders, and her large blue eyes were fixed on the distant hills, as though she saw a charm

there. Unconsciously, the young men stopped and looked at her, and wondered at her strange beauty. She did not appear at all delicate, neither was there any weakness in her appearance; her lithe form was by no means undeveloped, and the hands which grasped the oars did not appear to be lacking in strength. And yet Jabez could not help contrasting her with Margaret. It was not so much the difference in their complexion or in the colour of hair and eyes. They were both very beautiful in their way; but it was in the indefinable something that exists in the mind, which cannot well be expressed. This young girl seemed to invite confidence, one whom you would picture as the favourite at some country village, because of her loving-kindness to the poor and needy; indeed Jabez felt that this young girl answered to the ideal he had formed of the one he was to love.

They scarcely stopped a second, and then they were so hidden by the foliage of the trees that she had not seen them, neither, indeed, had she looked in the direction where they stood. They felt that it was not right to stand and gaze on her in such a way, so they went quietly on, leaving the girl to continue her dreams.

"What a bonny, beautiful girl!" exclaimed Reginald; "she is more lovely than any picture I ever saw."

"Are you smitten, old fellow?" said Jabez, laughingly.

"Smitten! not I. Do you know, Easterbrook, that I never yet saw the girl for whom I would bother five minutes."

"But yon girl has a beautiful face. Do you know, Reginald, that when I was a little fellow there was a lady who lived near my home, the vicar's daughter, who had just such a face, and I used to think when I grew to be a man I should love and marry some one like her."

"Good," cried Reginald, "and now you've seen your ideal, and a beautiful ideal it is too, Easterbrook, you must

get an introduction somehow, and then you will regard this as the luckiest holiday you ever knew."

Jabez did not answer.

"Do you know, old boy, that many of the girls at Heathertown would gladly change their names to become Mrs. Easterbrook; but you have been the coolest fellow with regard to the fair sex I ever saw."

"My dear Reginald, you know very well that I have been troubled about matters of far more serious import to me than that of getting married."

"You are right there, and even if you were inclined that way, there is not one girl in Heathertown who would suit you. Indeed, there seems to be no one who would suit any fellow who has heart and brains."

"You will be obliged to get some made to order, Reginald."

"Perhaps so. But surely if the girls knew what insipid creatures they are, that is, the majority of them, they would try and improve themselves. They seem to have no lofty, ennobling motives in life, and no true ideal. As far as I can see, their lives are made up of novel reading, and that of a very silly sort, and of indulging in a few silly games. Now, although I am as fond as any one of a good novel, or an exciting game, yet life made up of such things would be scarcely worth living."

"That's too hard on them," said Jabez, "but of course that young lady to whom you paid so much attention some time ago—Miss Hetty Brooklyn—cannot be classed among the insipid ones?"

"Easterbrook, I'll let you into a secret. Father and mother are anxious that I should marry and settle down, and they thought that she, being Margaret's friend and possessed of plenty of money, would be just the one. Well, honestly, I tried to like her. I went out with her a good deal, I even talked tenderly to her, thereby hoping

I should learn to love her. I tell you, I could as soon marry an opera dancer. She pretended to reciprocate all my attention, but I could see that she only played a part, as I have found out since she has played with others. There was nothing fresh, nothing of the pure, true, womanly tenderness which, if ever I am married, my wife must have."

"Well, you played a part with her, it seems."

"Yes, I expect I did, and I tell you I get down-hearted sometimes. I have been in society for years. I have, I think, an affectionate nature, and if I once found a wife and loved her, I would devote my life to making her happy, but I have never yet met with anyone who in any way satisfies me. I have seen some who, if they had been themselves, I think I could like; but they were so artificial, that is, they so catered to suit the conventional notions of the age, that they have become mere figures, to move in certain directions, according to the pressings of society. If I could meet with a true child of nature, one whose mind and heart were pure, in spite of the crooked influences of the times, I believe I could love as men seldom love."

"Why, Reginald, you are getting quite eloquent. However, I agree with you, and surely if those girls who practise so many arts to catch a husband could hear you, or if they knew what was essential to their own chances in getting a husband, they would be as God intended they should be."

"Well, there is some excuse for them, for, after all, the young men of our time are as artificial as the girls. There is a great deal of truth in what Mrs. Poyser says in *Adam Bede*. The women are, no doubt, curious creatures, but God Almighty made them to match the men; and I do think, thanks to you, Easterbrook, there is a more true, genuine ring about our village lads and lasses than there ever was before. You have dispelled many of their silly notions, and I think they are beginning to realise more of the value of life."

"Thanks, old fellow; but what led to all this talk?"

"Why, the golden-haired girl we saw on the margin of the lake."

"So it was. I wonder if we shall see her again?"

"Perhaps so," said Reginald; "should you like to?"

"I should indeed."

"Why, you've seen many as pretty as she."

"Yes, that is true; but somehow—well, after all the life of a bachelor is solitary and sad, and there was a charm about her."

"Surely, surely, you are not in love?" said Reginald, laughing.

"I think I am," said Jabez, not thinking of the meaning his words would convey.

Reginald looked at him. He was not the kind of man, he mused, that would fall in love easily. Had he been smitten by this girl's pretty face, had the ideal of his boyhood been fulfilled in this stranger of whom they had only caught a glimpse?

"But, Easterbrook, seriously, are you in love?"

Jabez did not answer, and Reginald wondered at his companion's humour, and then came to the conclusion that it was only a joke. Still the thought of a sudden attachment appeared possible, and he had often noticed that the men who never courted society, and who seemed to find no pleasure in the company of ladies, did sometimes suddenly become violently enamoured with some one of whom they knew little or nothing.

"I wonder what she's called," said Jabez, as they walked up to the gates of the hydropathic late at night.

"What, still thinking of the fair maid who sat near the margin of the lake? You may get an introduction, you may get to know her, my boy, don't get downhearted," laughed Reginald.

When Jabez was left alone that night his mind reverted

again and again to the young girl with golden hair, and the far-away look in her eyes, and he wondered who she was, and where she was staying, and if he should ever meet her again, and then he laughed at himself for troubling so much about one he never saw before.

"I wish I could though," he mused, "I wish I could learn to love some one like her; it would ease this gnawing pain at my heart. Why in the world should I care about one who is to all appearances entirely and altogether unfitted to become a minister's wife, even if she cared about me? One who almost scorns my faith, who almost scorns me? Besides, even if she were a Christian and loved me, I could not dare to ask her to be my wife. How could I ask her, surrounded by every luxury as she has been, to become the wife of a poor Methodist minister? Never! and yet I seem to love her more every day in spite of her apparent dislike to me and her unfitness to be my wife if I won her. Why cannot the affections be transferred? I wish it could, and yet I don't. What a grand creature she is after all, and if she were led to find a real living faith in Christ, what a wife she would be; but bah! I'm like a moth fluttering round a candle, and yet I cannot break the fascinating spell by which I am bound."

Meanwhile, Margaret sat in a room below with her brother Reginald making plans for the coming day.

"We shan't go anywhere specially to-morrow, I suppose," she said to Reginald, "and I think we shall have a quiet day. However, it is probable Hetty Brooklyn will come to Windermere while we are here, and then we may have some fun, for when she is with you she is one of the merriest companions possible."

"I hope she will not come, Margaret; the girl has got no soul, and although, as you say, she is merry, yet she is hollow and artificial; however, if she does come, we will try and make her visit a pleasant one. Fred Warren will

probably come too, and then you will have a companion."

"And thus poor Easterbrook will be left alone," said Margaret, with mock seriousness.

"Oh, we must try and get Easterbrook introduced to the beautiful girl we saw at the lake-side this evening."

"A beautiful girl you saw," cried Margaret; "who is she?"

"I don't know," replied Reginald. "We were walking down through a little wood, and we saw a young girl sitting in a boat looking away towards the distant hills. She was very beautiful, and truly I think Easterbrook was smitten. He has been talking about her since as though she were the realisation of his ideal. Would it not be grand, though, if he could find a truly kind, gentle girl for a wife; he must often be lonely and sad living in the way he does, and he is really a noble-hearted fellow. The way he has worked has been truly noble, and he has had to fight many a battle both in his own soul and among the people with whom he has had to work. Indeed, Easterbrook is in my idea what a minister should be. He is a manly man, he has neither cringed nor fawned, and he has not been either overbearing or indifferent towards the poor. Sometimes, however, I think his life is sad, and I do wish we could do something more for him than has been done. If he could find some such girl as we saw this evening to be his companion, he would, I believe, be much happier."

Margaret listened attentively to Reginald, and then said:—

"Mr. Easterbrook fall in love with a pretty face, Reg? Not he, he's not that kind of a fellow."

"I did not think so either, but she's made an impression on him. You know he is not one who talks much about ladies; he was quite willing to talk of her, however. But it's getting late. Good-night, Margaret, old girl. May God bless y

Then Margaret retired to her room, and for a long time sat in deep thought.

Reginald's words had touched her vanity. She had thought that she was the object of Jabez's love. She fancied, nay, she hoped, that she could sway him at will. The thought was pleasant to her. To be able to absorb the love of such a man as Jabez was to her something worth troubling about. He was so strong, so manly, and apparently self-sufficient, he was keen in intellect, and was a power in the village, and she took pride in the thought that he had given his love to her. Thus, when she was told that another occupied his thoughts, that he seemed to be strangely drawn towards a beautiful girl that he had only seen by the lake side, it gave a blow to her pet fancies, for if such were the case, her hold upon him could indeed be but very weak. She did not care about him, she told herself, he was nothing to her, and never would be, in fact, she despised him, and a good part of his creed, and yet she admitted that he had strangely stirred her nature, and made her think more than ever she had thought before. The strong, manly nature and the now strong faith and deep goodness of the young minister was, she knew, influencing her thought and life, and yet the only thing she confessed she desired with regard to him was that she might have him in her power.

I think it is usually the case that a nature, however nobly endowed, when not governed by principles of religion, will, in the case of disappointment, show that disappointment by some kind of petty and paltry revenge. At any rate, this was so in the case of Margaret. Reginald's news had disappointed her, and because she had not Christ abiding in her soul, she allowed the mean side of her nature to conquer the nobler traits of her character. She yielded to a mean desire to show Jabez that he was beneath her notice, she, who often avowed that anything low and mean was incompatible with a person of education and refinement, deter-

mined to act in a mean way although she would not at that time confess her determination to be of such a nature.

"Yes," she mused, "I will show him to-morrow that I care less than nothing for him, that he has no interest for me, save of contempt, that I despise him utterly."

She thought for a while, and then went on:

"But I don't despise him, something in his nature forbids it; I do dislike him, he is so vain, so haughty. He acts as though he were conferring a favour upon us to come with us, and yet—and yet—. Why should I try and hurt his feelings, why should I show my dislike for him? There is no reason except that I want to do, and I will. I will make him feel how poor and small he is. To-morrow he shall feel the difference in our positions, he shall know that I am Miss Ashton of Heathertown Grange, and that he is only a—but why should I trouble about him? I don't know why, only I'll humble him to-morrow."

Then she retired; but the morrow was to move Margaret's nature as it had never been moved before, and all her vain threats were to be blown hither and thither by the storms of circumstances which to her were terrible.

CHAPTER XV.

TEMPEST TOSSED.

JABEZ did not give Margaret an opportunity to carry her determinations into practice as soon as she expected. He was very quiet and reserved during the breakfast-hour, and did not in the slightest degree appear to notice Margaret's ill-humour, and when she asked Reginald to go with her to a distant hill, without even mentioning the young minister's name, he still appeared indifferent, much to Margaret's disappointment. He left the family soon after breakfast, and the young lady stood at one of the windows and watched him as he strode away, and then chided herself for not asking him to accompany Reginald and herself.

"Why need I be so mean," she thought, "simply because Reginald told me of a foolish surmise? He is my father's guest, and I ought not to treat him so rudely; however, he does not seem to mind, for he has gone away quite jauntily."

She was not a very pleasant companion that day, and time after time Reginald asked her why she was so disagreeable, but he got no answer from her, save a sharp request to let her alone. They had taken lunch with them, and remained out among the hills for several hours, and Reginald was not at all sorry to return when his watch told him it was nearly five o'clock.

Jabez had gone in just the opposite direction to them. He had taken a book and started to walk through the

woods and fields down towards the lake-side. The country was exceedingly quiet, and he was glad to be alone. Now and then he saw happy lovers walking among the trees, and again he saw a boat move away slowly through the waters, propelled by the gentle stroke of some bright-eyed girl, while a sunburnt youth gazed on her face at the same time, pretending to steer the little craft. He could not help smiling as he saw them together, and then wondered how he, during the years of his life, had never been made happy in a similar way. Time after time did the face of the beautiful stranger appear to him; but in spite of all thoughts concerning her, his heart still yearned for the one who treated him with but little courtesy or kindness.

He walked on for several miles until he had reached the end of the lake, where he took some lunch, and then returned on the other side. When he came to "the ferry" he saw a man standing near the lake-side, and wishing to go at once, asked him how long it would be before the ferry boat started.

"Just three minutes," replied the man, "but ye'd better have my boat. I'll run you up to the steam-boat pier at Bowness in a few minutes."

"Thank you," said Jabez, "you may."

They got into a boat, and the man began to pull steadily.

"How still and smooth are the waters of the lake," mused the young minister.

"Yes, sir; but you should see them in a storm. I've been out when the water is as smooth as it is now, and in five minutes afterwards you would think you were out in a stormy sea."

"Do the storms come on so suddenly?"

"Yes, sir; and there are whirlpools sometimes that comes in certain parts. They are quite dangerous, and it's only experienced boatmen that can manage when they come.

Some say," continued the man, "that the devil is at the bottom of the lake, and he just gets up the whirlpools to wreak his vengeance and to show his power."

Jabez could not forbear smiling.

"Yes, I see you doan't believe it, sir; but I could tell you of the things that has happened here in this country that would make your hair curl. Do you see yon hills?" he said, pointing to a high peak in the distance; "well, I've hearn my mother tell o' twenty-four witches as come there one night on their broomsticks, and they all laughed and danced around a big goat as was in the middle o' a circle. The goat was red, and he had four horns i' his forehead, and his eyes wur fire, and the witches all laughed so loud that the people could hear them down here. The lake, sir, was whirlpools fro' one end to the other, and the lightning wur flashing, and the thunders wur rollin' as though it wur the judgment day."

"Have you ever seen any of this?"

"Noa, sir, things like that doant happen now, and if they did people wouldn't believe them, their heads are so full of learnin'; but here we are at the pier. If you want a safe boat get mine, sir, and no harm can happen if I go with you. Take a card, sir—I'm mostly here in the mornings, but I live on the other side of the lake; everyone knows me, sir. I'm a most respectable man. I'm called John Drake, sir, and I can lend you a boat as cheap as anyone, and I can assure safety if I go with you. Beware of the storms and the whirlpools. Good evenin', sir, and thank you."

Jabez smiled at the old man's conversation, and was just starting for the hotel when he heard a voice behind him, and turning round saw that John Drake had followed him.

"I don't want to say nothin' against nobody's else's boat, sir, but if you'll take the advice of a friend, don't you hire anybody's boat but mine. I'm honest, sir, and some of the others, sir— Well—I never say nothin' 'gainst nobody, but if

you want to go home alive, hire my boat. John Drake, sir, is my name."

"Yes, I'll not forget, but possibly I shall not do much boating while I am here. I intend to do a lot of mountain-climbing."

"Not spend much time boating? I don't want to say nothin' 'gainst nothing nor nobody, but comin' to Windermere is nothin' without boating, and if you want to be safe hire my boat."

"All right," cried Jabez, "good-evening;" and again he turned to walk up the village street, but he had not proceeded many steps when he felt a hand on his shoulder and again he heard John Drake's voice.

"Nobody shall say as how I never gave a stranger a welcome, sir," cried John, "so, sir, if ye'll give my card to your friends and tell 'em, sir, that I don't want to say nothin' 'gainst nobody nor nothin', but if they want to be safe and go home alive, and enjoy themselves while they are here, let 'em hire their boats of me."

On arriving at the hydropathic he found Margaret and Reginald, the former looking anything but in an amiable mood, while the latter looked as though he were glad to be among those who would be pleasant, but Jabez did not remain with them as he wanted to go and dress for dinner. Entering his room, the thought occurred to him that his conduct had not been praiseworthy. He had come to Windermere as the guest of the Ashtons, and it could not be right for him to ramble away alone as he had done; so after dinner he asked Margaret to take a walk with him down by the lake-side. Margaret's eyes flashed strangely as he asked her, and a peculiar smile played around her face as she accepted his escort.

Reginald pretended to condole with him, and told him he hoped she would be more pleasant to him that evening than she had been during the day, but unmindful of his lively sallies, they started for their walk.

The sun had just set, and the twilight began to gently gather around them ; the bright moon overhead told them, however, that there was no probability of darkness, and so they wandered quietly on. The air was clear and cool, and a wondrous stillness seemed to rest on everything. Only now and then was silence broken. Sometimes they heard the faint splash of an oar in the still waters, and once the silence was more effectually broken by the steam-boat that took passengers up and down the beautiful lake. The sound of a whistle echoed among the hills until they seemed to be inhabited by a thousand weird creatures, who uttered strange cries of distress. The twilight deepened, and the rays of the moon showed themselves with more clearness, until the lake seemed an enchanted pond amidst hills inhabited by fairies. The hills which sloped away on either side were decked in gorgeous foliage, and in the dim light they appeared to Margaret like the beautiful shore she had seen in her dream.

Both were charmed by the quiet beauty of the scene, until they seemed to forget the difference in their belief, and in their modes of thought. There was a strange power in the scene, it held and fascinated them, it made Margaret forget her hard feelings, and he felt she was nearer to him than she had ever been. The music of their natures had been touched, and each felt that the glorious scenery was a strong band linking them together, and making them feel they were kindred spirits.

" I cannot find words to express the feelings which possess me just now, Miss Ashton," Jabez said. " This is beyond my fondest hopes ; the lake is at our feet, while we can dimly see the glorious hills all around covered with a foliage which to me has a beauty beyond expression."

" Yes, yes, it is glorious," she said ; " look, see that little boat. There are two in it, they are lovers. Hear how they laugh, how musical it sounds amidst the splash of the oars.

See the tiny wavelets the boat makes, how they glisten even in this dim light. Would it not be nice to take a row on the lake on this moonlit night?"

"Yes, it would. Come back now; we are not far from the little landing-place; we can get them in abundance. I daresay my friend John Drake will be only too glad to lend me his."

"No, I do not want to go yet. This is too beautiful to leave. Listen, there is another boating party coming, and they are singing. How sweet is the sound as it is swept across the water. I think I know the song."

The twilight of day was now gone, and the moonlight was supreme. The sky overhead was rather hazy, but not sufficiently so to hide in any degree the light of the moon. It was a moonlit night in Cumberland, among its grand rugged hills, and its silvery lakes, and Margaret's dark eyes flashed brilliantly, and her fine face showed how she felt the power of Nature's beauty.

The party in the boat came nearer, and Jabez saw that there were four sitting in it, and as they swept on two of them sang. One of the voices was clear and strong, and the surrounding hills and the water around seemed to make the voice more sweet and the song more enchanting. It was only a few lines they caught, but it was enough to tell them what the song was, and by whom it was composed. It seemed to carry them away to the sunny land of Italy, where they might stand upon the shore and watch the waves, or be among the picturesque lakes surrounded by lofty mountains.

There are times when our imagination seems to know no bounds. When we are swept on by our thoughts, until the fancied world with its wondrous brightness and rich profusion of all that is lovely and desirable is far more real to us than the hard material surroundings of our lives. Such was the case with Jabez and Margaret as they stood together

watching the silvery waves of the lake. In their mind's eye they saw scenes of which in ordinary moments they would never think of dreaming; they heard, or seemed to hear, strange sweet sounds which had hitherto been unthought of. The song, too, which the party in the boat sang, rendered their imagination more vivid, for it accorded with the scene they saw:

> "All was still, save the echoed song
> Of Italia's dark-eyed daughters,
> Or the distant sound of the boatman's oar,
> As it dips in the sparkling waters.
> Though bright the morn may beam, love,
> Along the smiling sea,
> Dearer far than morn, love,
> Are moonlit waves to me—"

The boat swept on, the splash of the oars making a music that mingled sweetly with the song, and as the two voices together took up the refrain, and as the sound echoed among the solemn hills, Margaret was so moved that the tears started to her eyes, and she heaved a deep sigh.

"Come," said Jabez, "let us go back to the landing-stage. We shall not be able to sail on the moonlit sea, but we can sail o'er the moonlit lake, which I think will be quite as beautiful."

She did not speak, but went quietly by his side beneath the tall trees, close by the rippling water.

For two or three minutes silence reigned between them, both seemed at a loss for words. The young minister's heart was beating wildly, for a strong desire came to him to tell Margaret of his love, although he knew how useless it would be, because he felt it was not reciprocated. Then Jabez remembered how Reginald had told him that Fred Warren would join them in a few days, and a feeling of jealousy crept into his soul. Then he would no longer have this beautiful girl for his companion, for she would

naturally prefer her future husband, rich and well connected as he was, to him, the poor minister, unknown, and by her despised. So strong was this feeling that he said abruptly :—

"I suppose Mr. Warren will be here in a few days?"

"I expect so," said Margaret, absently.

"That will make your visit far more pleasant to you."

"Why?"

Easterbrook for the moment forgot himself, forgot what was due to her, forgot what was right and discreet to say.

"You will naturally rejoice that your future husband is coming," he said roughly, almost brutally.

Margaret was silent.

"It's in everybody's mouth, you know," Jabez went on, feeling that he was acting a very ungentlemanly part, and yet unable to turn the conversation into a different channel, "and I thought you would rejoice at his coming."

The revulsion of feeling was so great, that for a moment she could not utter a word. The scene on which they had been looking was so beautiful, the night was so wondrously silent and solemn, the thoughts which had been passing through her mind were so far removed from everything connected with her would-be husband, that a feeling of detestation for him crept into her heart. And the rough, and to her unfeeling words of Jabez, aroused her passion as it was seldom aroused.

"How dare you insult me?" she said angrily. "By what right do you mention that with which you have no connection?"

Jabez felt his position, and did not know how to extricate himself.

"I only thought, that is, it—it seems natural you should enjoy his—his society better than—than—that is—"

Margaret's fiery temper had the best of her for a moment, and she scarcely knew what she said.

"You are right, sir, in supposing I should enjoy his society better than yours," she cried passionately, "indeed, who would not, for neither he nor any other gentleman would seek to talk of that which did not concern him."

They had by this time come close to the place where the boats lay ready for hire, and Jabez, almost stunned by the anger of her tone and words, said with a clumsy attempt to treat her angry words as a joke:

"Well, if I am not a gentleman, I can row, there are boats at hand, 'come o'er the moonlit sea.'"

"Certainly I shall not come," said Margaret, "and I prefer to be alone."

The temper of Jabez was by this time being moved. He had not intended to hurt her feelings. All he had said was simply owing to his hopeless love for her, and he felt himself badly treated. So he lifted his hat, and with a tone of voice as haughty as her own, said:

"Then I will no longer trouble you. I will take a row by myself. Good-evening."

He strode up to a man who stood by a boat.

"Is this your boat, my man?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"I wish to hire it for an hour."

"Better wait 'till to-morrow, unless you know the lake, the sky is gittin' murky."

"Do you think it dangerous then?"

"Oh, no. I don't know as to that, but then—"

Jabez looked and saw that Margaret was watching them, so he said,

"Well, if you will not lend me yours, I'll get another," and without another word to the man, went and hired another boat, took off his hat again to Margaret, who still stood and watched him, and then paddled the little craft out on the placid waters of the lake.

Margaret watched him, as when he had got away from

the boats which hindered him from rowing, he pulled off his coat, seated himself in the middle of the boat, took the oars, and sent it swiftly through the waters, singing as he went the first verse of the song to which they had been listening:—

> "Come o'er the moonlit sea,
> The waves are brightly glowing,
> The winds have sunk to their evening rest
> And the tide is gently flowing."

But the tone of his voice seemed mocking, and she felt that something had come between them which could never be taken away. She watched the boat and its occupant until it vanished in the dim light, and then, as if unconsciously, wandered to the spot from which they had come.

By this time her anger had gone, and she was able to quietly think over the words that had been said, and she was obliged to confess to herself that in reality he had said nothing so very reprehensible after all. Besides, it might be because he was jealous of Warren that he had spoken so, and she bitterly repented having acted so harshly, and in spite of herself a tender feeling for the young minister crept into her heart. Had he been very humble she would not have felt thus, but because he had been able to return scorn for scorn she had been drawn towards him.

"I wonder what he is thinking about, now," she mused. "I expect he is very indignant with me; but I'll be at the landing-stage when he comes back and speak as though nothing had happened, and then all will be well."

No sooner, however, had she made this determination, than she felt a chilly wind blow, and she heard a moaning sound come up the lake. Then the wind blew louder, and the moonlight became dimmer, and from the way the waves beat upon the shore she knew that something was wrong. She walked rapidly back to the landing pier, the waters of

the lake becoming more troubled all the time, until they roared like the waves of the sea roar in a storm.

"Oh," she thought, "it was only a cockle-shell of a boat that he went in, it could not live in such angry waters, and even if he can swim it will be of little use when the waves are rolling as they are now."

When she reached the pier a large group of men had gathered together, and without a moment's hesitation she went up to them and said:

"A gentleman hired a boat here about an hour ago; have you seen him come back?"

"No, ma'am, that we haven't," replied the men.

"Can a small boat live in such angry water as that?"

"It's very doubtful, ma'am. There be two or three boats out besides. One have got one of our men, so I expect 'twill be safe enough, but the others I am very doubtful about."

"How long do these storms last generally?"

"There's no telling, ma'am, sometimes hours, sometimes not nearly so long."

"Could you not man a boat, a large one, and go out and see if any are in distress?" cried Margaret, and there was a tone of anguish in her voice.

"What boat could live in that water?" replied a stout, strong-looking, young fellow. "Look at that now!"

As he spoke the wind blew louder, the waves became more boisterous, and they swept madly over the boats which were fastened to the shore and made them dash against each other.

"I know it is rough," said Margaret, speaking loud, so that her voice might be heard above the roar of wind and wave; "but to strong, hardy fellows like you it should be nothing. I'll give ten pounds to any of you who will man a boat and go out and see what may be done."

"But what's the use, mum?" said the men in reply. "We don't know which way to go if we went out. The

gentleman you want to know about may be gone up towards Ambleside or down towards Lake Side. We should only go into danger ourselves and do no good."

"Can nothing be done?" cried Margaret.

"Nothing as we know on, mum; if we knowed where the gentleman you want was, then we might do some good, but now as 'tis 'twould only be foolishness."

"Yes," said another, "there is nothing but the mercy of God for us to trust in."

Margaret left them, and again walked towards the spot where she and Jabez had stood during the early part of the evening. She felt she could not go to the hydropathic, she could not answer the questions her parents and Reginald would naturally put to her. A little more than an hour before the waters had been smooth, the whole scene had appeared to her like a poet's dream; since then she had been angry with him, had told him she wished to be alone, and he had with apparently anything but kindly feelings towards her gone away alone on the treacherous waters of the lake.

Then the words of the man who had spoken last rang in her ears, "There is nothing but the mercy of God for us to trust in," and it seemed to her but very little indeed.

"He may be struggling in the water even now," she thought, and then she stopped and listened to the rolling waves, and as they roared and sobbed they told her of nothing but despair and death.

"What if he should be dead now?" was the thought which came into her mind next, and a great dread laid hold on her which seemed to chill her veins.

For a minute she could not grasp the thought, and when her mind was sufficiently clear to do so, it seemed to rend her heart. She knew not why she should feel thus, why such anguish should possess her soul as she thought of his death.

"What can I do?" she cried, "oh, what can I do to save Jabez?"

The name which she uttered in her agony startled her, even amidst the howling of the storm and in spite of her own emotions.

"Jabez," she repeated, "what right have I to call him Jabez? Oh, God—I know now—I love him—I would die to save him!"

The shock she had suffered had revealed her feelings. She found that she loved the man she had pretended to despise. Loved him, although a little while before she had insulted him, loved him although she knew not where he was.

The revelation was terrible. Never surely was love revealed at such a time, in such a way. Not until there was imminent danger of his death did she realise that he was her all in all. Did she only find it out when it was too late to give either him or herself any happiness? Could it be that she would have to bear the burden of knowing that he whom she loved was dead?

But Margaret was of a strong practical turn of mind. What could she do? That was the question. Was there no means by which she could render him help?

"There's nothing but the mercy of God to trust in," were the words which rang in her ears. Jabez believed in prayer. He knew, he said, that God answered prayer. She could not man a boat, she could not render help in that way at all. Could she pray? She had said time after time she did not believe in a God, but now she felt His need, and the cry of her soul was, "Oh that I could believe!"

"It is all I can do," she cried. "If I went out on the lake I could do no good. I—I can only pray!"

And so she knelt down by the side of the path, while the surging of the waves and the howling of the winds told her of possible danger and death for the man she found that she loved like her own soul. Her face was as pale as death,

and her eyes shone like fire, while her hair blew wildly about, according to the moods of the wind.

I have heard of an infidel, who, when fearing about the salvation of his soul, knelt down to pray, and his prayer was as follows:

"Oh, God—if there is a God—save my soul—if I've got a soul."

And Margaret, in her unbelief and despair, felt much as did that infidel. It seemed as though she were praying to nothing, and yet, behind and beyond all, something told her that there was a God, Who could hear and answer prayer.

"Oh, God!" she said, "that is, Jabez's God, save him. Oh, save him from death."

Prayer must do good to the one who prays, even if that prayer is not answered in the way the supplicator desires. No soul can commune with its Maker without being strengthened and made better and purer. It was so with Margaret. She had scarcely an idea to what she was praying, except that it was to something which might help her, but the prayer, such as it was, gave her hope and confidence, and for the first time since childhood she felt something of the presence of God.

She rose from her kneeling posture, and again went back to the landing stage, where she found much excitement.

"I will give a hundred pounds if you'll save my daughter," she heard a gentleman say in tones of anguish.

"If we knowed where she was, sir, we might, but—"

"She did not go out until evening. I did not wish her to go, but she said she wanted a row. I think she said she was going towards Ambleside."

"We'll try, sir; but there'll be no chance of doin' nothin'," was the reply.

"Look, look!" cried a voice, "there's a boat a-comin now, driftin' towards the shore."

Margaret looked, and saw a dark object moving on the turbulent waters. In another minute it dashed on the shore, and the men went away to examine it, while Margaret eagerly followed.

"It's the boat!" they cried.

"What boat?"

"The boat a gentleman hired jist afore the storm began."

"What gentleman?"

"Him as come with a young lady, and went away by hisself singing."

"You are sure," cried the gentleman who had offered money if they would go and search for his daughter, "that this is not the boat my daughter hired?"

"Don't think so, sir; it might be, for the boats be much alike, and in this light it is difficult to tell, but I a'most sure it's the one the gentleman hired!"

"And is there any chance of his safety?" cried Margaret.

"God only knows; he might have been near the shore and thus got safe. He might, but,—but—'tis terribly doubtful."

"Look, what's this?" cried another voice. "I found it twisted around the seat."

"It's a coat," replied another, "the coat the gentleman took off so as to be able to row."

"Then God have mercy upon the gentleman," cried an old man.

"Is it Easterbrook they are talking about, Margaret?"

It was Reginald who spoke. Margaret looked up, put her arms around his neck, and laid her head on his shoulder, and felt as though her heart was breaking.

CHAPTER XVI.

OUT IN THE STORM.

When Jabez found himself alone on the waters of the lake, away out of sight of Margaret, he was in anything but a pleasant mood. He thought that she could have given no plainer evidence of her dislike for him than to tell him that she desired to be alone. It was not much he had said. When the most had been made of it, it was only a joke in bad taste; but he could certainly see no reason why she should speak to him as she had done, except because she disliked him very much.

"I am glad, though," he thought, "that I acted in quite as independent a way as she did, and now once for all I *will* destroy every vestige of tender feeling I have towards her. Surely love cannot live on nothing, and I, by crushing every thought that will have a tendency to lead me to love her, will surely destroy my love. I'll try harder than ever anyhow, so good-bye, Miss Ashton, to all hopes of winning you, even though it would be right," and Jabez set his lips firmly together and pulled steadily up the lake.

Her angry words came to him time after time, and he was glad within himself that he felt anything but pleasantly towards her. Perhaps, after all, his love was nothing but a passing fancy, and this hope gave him a grain of comfort, and he tried again to sing the song which they had heard that night.

After he had rowed nearly a mile up the lake he felt the wind become chilly, but he did not mind the cold air, for the exertion of rowing was causing the blood to run joyously through his veins, neither did he notice the gathering darkness, but presently when the waters began to get turbulent he wondered what was the matter.

"I'll pull towards yonder shore," he said to himself, "but stay, what is that I see? Surely it is another boat. However, I have no business to intrude on the privacy of those who are out for a row like myself, and probably it is a pair of lovers."

No sooner had he said this than the lake seemed to be maddened as though some strange power were at its bottom lashing it into fury.

The boat in which he sat was a mere cockle-shell, as Margaret had said, and it was tossed by the waves as though it were a bit of cork. He found, however, that by pulling steadily he was nearing the shore, when a cry of distress came from the boat he had seen a minute before.

"Help! oh help!" cried the voice. It was a woman's voice Jabez was sure, and in spite of the danger he rowed as well as he could towards her, away out into the middle of the lake. It was a terrible strain, for the boats were both almost completely at the mercy of the waves, but he did manage after considerable difficulty to bring his boat near to the one from which the cry for help came. The difficulty, however, was to bring them side by side, but as Jabez was meditating how it might best be done, a strong current of water sent the little crafts against each other, and Jabez immediately caught hold of the one in which the person who had cried for help, sat.

Although the storm had obscured the light of the moon, and they were tossed wildly about, he could distinguish the form of a girl sitting apparently paralysed with fear.

"Can you manage to come here to me?" said Jabez.

"Oh no, I dare not move," cried the girl.

"Then I must come to you," said Jabez, "for there is no means of getting you ashore else."

This was easier said than done, for the storm was now nearly at its height, and both boats were small, although hers seemed the larger of the two.

"If I do it at all," he said, "I must jump right into the middle of your boat, for if I step on the side it will surely topple over. Now then, steady."

He leapt close to the spot where the girl sat, and the little craft made an awful lurch as though it would overturn, but a huge wave on the other side righted it,and the two sat together.

"I am afraid it is not much good rowing," said Jabez, "but I'll try."

The girl had pulled in her oars at the first indication of the storm, and it was well she had done so, otherwise they would have been powerless to do anything. They had been drifting two or three minutes when they shot into comparatively smooth waters.

"Surely the storm must be abating," cried Jabez, "and yet around us everywhere the wind is howling and the water is as rough as ever."

Then a great dread laid hold of him, for he felt sure the boat was describing a circle. He had been told of whirlpools, told how the boats went around and around, and then when carried to the middle were sucked in to some awful depth of water.

"I am not afraid to die," he cried, "but I will not die without a struggle," and with a strength almost superhuman he pulled away from the smooth water out towards the rolling waves. It was a terrible struggle, for there was a wondrous power in the circling waters, and time after time he was on the point of giving up; but with a strength born of despair he at last succeeded in getting away from the treacherous calm that looked so inviting.

"This cannot last much longer," Jabez thought to himself, as the waves dashed over them time after time; "the boat is nearly filled with water, and we may be thrown into the lake at any moment."

It had now become so dark that they could scarcely see anything, the oars had been swept out of his hands, and so they were at the mercy of the waves.

"Take hold of my hand," said Jabez to his companion; "we may be thrown into the water at any moment." But she did not move or speak. He laid his hand firmly upon her arm, and not a moment too soon, for a monstrous wave rolled over them, and he felt that they were both sinking in the deep water, at the same time swept onward by some mighty force.

"We are lost!" was the terrible thought that flashed through his mind; "there can be no succour nor help except from God. Oh, Father in Heaven, save us!"

The next moment he felt firm soil beneath his feet, and with a shout of thankfulness he saw that they had been swept on the shore. With difficulty he dragged his companion over the stony banks of the lake, on through a thick growth of ferns and brambles, and hazel bushes, until they were safe from the surging waters.

"I thank Thee, oh God," was the cry that escaped his lips; then he felt his head become dizzy, a chill ran through his veins, he heard a loud roaring noise, and then he remembered no more.

When he awoke to consciousness he was lying amongst tall ferns, rank grass, and other vegetation that grew beneath the trees in the woods that surround a large portion of Windermere Lake, and by his side knelt the girl he had saved. She was chafing his hands, and murmuring as she did so, "Surely he is not dead."

"Where am I?" cried Jabez, in a confused way; "dark night, roaring waters, where am I?"

"Thank God, you are alive," cried his companion. "Oh! thank God, you have not lost your life in saving mine."

Then he remembered where he was, remembered with thankfulness that by the mercy of God they had been saved from a watery grave. Then he felt his cold wet garments cling to him, and he shivered with the cold.

"Oh, you must be wet and cold," he said to the girl, his own condition reminding him of hers, and forgetting his own discomforts in thinking of her.

"I have not thought about it," she said. "Thank God you are safe, you did not lose your life in saving mine."

That was the thought that seemed uppermost in her mind, and she had evidently forgotten herself in her anxiety for her rescuer's recovery.

Jabez rose to his feet. "Surely," he said, "there must be a house near somewhere. I know there are cottages along this bank of the lake; let us see if we cannot find one."

The girl took hold of his arm at his request, but it was with difficulty she moved, her dripping garments clung around her and her limbs were cramped.

"Hark," cried Jabez, "the storm is abating. I have been told they are only sudden squalls, they quickly come, they quickly go. I wonder now, if I were to shout, would anyone hear me? I'll try anyhow."

He gave a loud "halloo," which seemed to ring through the woods above the sound of the surging waters in the angry lake.

There was no answer to his cry.

He gave another shout, louder than before, and this time he thought he heard a faint reply. He shouted again, and this time the reply came clearer than before.

They went as rapidly as they could towards the spot from whence the sound came, and had not proceeded far when they saw a flickering light.

"We shall be safe now, I think," said Jabez to his companion; "see, someone comes bearing a lantern."

"Where are yo?" cried a voice that seemed familiar to Jabez.

They answered back, and soon came to a cottage which was almost hidden by the trees, and which they would have had considerable difficulty in finding without a guide. The man with the lantern led them up to the cottage door without speaking again, but before opening it said abruptly:

"Been out in the storm?"

"Yes."

"Whose boat have you had?"

"I don't know."

"Did'st a hire it of a little chap wi' bow legs?"

"No."

"Then 'tis no wonder you got nearly drowned. I don't want to say nothin' 'gainst nothin' nor nobody, but if you had hired John Drake's boat, this would never have happened."

Jabez recognised his companion of some hours before, but not wishing to have an harangue with him in his present condition, refrained from referring to their meeting. John was beginning a new attack on him for not hiring his boat, when Jabez cut him short by telling him they wanted food and a change of raiment.

"Oh, yes, yes," cried John, "I forgot, but I don't want to say nothin' 'gainst nothin', nor—"

"Do open the door," cried Jabez; "we are nearly dead and drenched to the skin."

"Old woman," shouted John, "take this young woman into the house and give her some cloas."

A kindly-faced old lady immediately came, and seeing their condition, at once took the young lady upstairs, while John took Jabez into a kitchen where a bright fire was burning.

"Here's some o' my son's best cloas," said John, going into a back room, "happen they'll suit yo. T' any rate they are dry. Come in here and take off yer wet dabs."

This Jabez was glad to do, and quickly attired himself in a suit of grey tweed clothes, which fitted him very well.

When alone, the scenes through which he had passed shot like lightning through his mind—Margaret's apparent kindness, then the song on the lake, and then her angry words, and his almost angry departure in the little boat. Vividly the picture of the rising storm came back to him, of the lady he had rescued, the struggle for life, and the remembrance of the mercy of God in saving them. He did not know the young lady he had rescued. He had not had a chance of seeing her face, but he remembered that her voice was sweet and musical, and that she was not so tall as Margaret.

"I suppose I shall see her directly," he said to himself, as he finished dressing. "I wonder now—I wonder—but it is absurd, so I'll not think about it."

Then he thought of what Margaret would think about him. She would know of the rising of the storm and of the danger he was in. Would she be anxious about him? Would she be sorry if he had been drowned?

"I will not think about her," he said. "I was foolish to accept Mr. Ashton's invitation, and so be constantly in his daughter's society. I'll think about this young lady whom I have saved. What a mercy, though, that we are not now at the bottom of the lake instead of being safely housed here."

He knelt down beside the little bed in the room and offered his thanks to God for His mercy in saving them, and then went out into the room where the old man sat.

He looked at Jabez very closely when he entered, and quickly recognised him.

"Didn't I warn yo?" the old man said. "Didn't I tell you to be sure and 'ire my boat? I don't want to say

nothin' 'gainst nothin' nor nobody, but if you had had my boat you'd a got bot back to Bowness without a mishap. Mind that now."

"Well, you see, I hired my boat in a hurry," replied Jabez, and then he told John how he met with the young lady who had come with him, and asked him whether he knew how she was.

"My old woman wur here a minute or so ago," he said, "and told me as how she wur gittin' on in good style."

"The storm seems to have abated, does it not?" said Jabez, changing the subject.

"Oh, ay, the squall is over now. They don't come often or last long this time of the year; but it wur wild a bit since. Ye ought to be thankful, young man, that ye are not a corpse; mayhap ye'll believe what I told you this mornin now."

"Do you think you could take us back to-night, that is, back to Bowness, if the young lady is sufficiently recovered?"

"Wait an hour or so," cried John, eagerly, "wait till the water have settled down quiet a bit, and then I'll take yo back. It is late and squally, but as 'tis yo, I'll take yo both for five shillin'. I will, as tis you," and John look as though he had made a magnanimous offer.

Just then there was a movement outside the door, and immediately John's wife entered, and behind her followed a young girl of about nineteen years of age. She was a little above the medium height, but not so tall as Margaret. Her hair was golden, and hung in tangled masses down over her shoulders. Her eyes were of a deep, violet blue, and her skin was pure and fair. She looked pale and weary; but that did not hide from Jabez the fact that he had seen her before. It was she who sat in the rocking boat in the dim twilight only the evening before, down by the little wood which stretched to the lake. How different she appeared from Margaret. What a contrast between the

soft, gentle-looking eyes of this maiden, and the bright flashing eyes of the Yorkshire belle whom he loved. How marked was the difference between the winning, beautiful face of this stranger, and the haughty, yet noble face of Margaret.

She came forward with a smile on her face, and greeted the young minister warmly.

"Oh, thank you so much for what you have done for me; but for you I should have been—"

"Let us not speak of it again," cried Jabez; "the storm is over now, and we are both safe. I am glad to see you have a warm, dry dress, while I, likewise, am fortunate in being accommodated with our host's son's clothes. But, perhaps, you feel faint; a warm cup of tea now will do you a world of good."

"And a warm cup of tea you shall both have," cried Mrs. Drake. "John, you lazy man, have you got the kettle boilin', or have you been gossipin' instead of mindin' your work?"

"I'm sorry it ain't a boilin'," replied John, somewhat crest-fallen, "but I had to give this gen'leman a little information, and so on."

"Ay, and you'd a great deal rather talk nor work, ony day," said the old woman, sharply. "Get up, now, and fetch some more sticks. Don't mind us, sir," continued Mrs. Drake, looking at Jabez, "but I must keep him in order, or ther'd be no livin' with him, he'd get so conceity."

"I don't want to say nothin' 'gainst nothin—" muttered John, as he went to do his wife's bidding.

"Thou'rt all'ays sayin' so, and yet thou'st nivver a good word for ony one," cried the old lady, sharply, at the same time winking at Jabez to indicate that this talk was only little pleasantry. Then she bustled into the next room get some refreshments.

"Do you think we can get back to Bowness to-night?" said the young lady to Jabez, eagerly.

"If you are well enough, we may," replied Jabez, "for the storm is nearly gone. You are staying at Bowness, I expect?"

"Yes, at the 'Old England Hotel.' My name is Violet Verner. I am staying there with papa. I am afraid he will be terribly anxious about me."

"And my name is Jabez Easterbrook. I am staying at 'The Hydropathic' with some friends, and I am afraid they likewise will be anxious as to my welfare."

"I am sure papa will be glad to see you, Mr. Easterbrook," she cried eagerly, "especially after I tell him what you have done for me. I do hope we shall be able to get back soon. Can we get a boat?"

"Yes; but will you not be afraid to venture on the water again so soon after the storm?"

"Oh, no, not when yo— that is, I love the water as a rule, and like to be paddling around all the day long, and shall not be afraid even now in a large boat and someone who is so strong and brave with me."

She said this with all the simplicity of a child, and did not seem to realise that she was paying a compliment.

A few minutes after this Mrs. Drake came in with some warm tea and other refreshments, while John went out to get his largest boat which he always kept on this side of the lake, and to call his son, so that they might take the young couple to the other side.

By the time the boat was ready the two had finished their repast, and being warmly wrapped up by Mrs. Drake, they soon seated themselves comfortably in her husband's large boat.

By this time the storm had gone, the sky was clear and blue, while the bright moon shone down on the silvery waters. The lake was still rough, for like a child whose

passion is over is still fretful and discontented, so the lake refused to settle down, for a time at least, to the peaceful calm which possessed it before the storm.

They had gone about half the distance to the landing-stage at Bowness when they saw two or three boats near them. Immediately John Drake hailed them.

"Who are you?" was the question asked in reply to John's shout.

"Pull up an' see," cried John, slackening his oars.

In a minute they came up by the side of John's boat, and Jabez recognised the man who had lent him the boat, while in return several of the men who had seen him start on his cruise had recognised him, and they gave a loud hurrah, the sound of which swept over the water and echoed among the hills.

"Be the young lady the daughter of the gen'leman as is stayin' at the 'Old England?'" asked one of the men.

"Yes," replied the young lady, "of Mr. Verner. Is he very anxious about me?"

Her question was not answered, but instead shout after shout was given by the hardy and warm-hearted men of the lake district.

When they reached the landing-stage they found that a large crowd had gathered, and no sooner did Violet Verner step on the shore than a gentleman, her father, caught her in his arms, and telling the boatmen to call on him the next day, bore her to the house. Jabez, likewise, after giving all the money he had with him, and which he had taken care to put into the pockets of his borrowed clothes, to John Drake, and telling him he should hear from him again, was starting for his hotel, when he felt his arm being touched.

He turned and saw Margaret and Reginald standing together. The former was as pale as death, but in her eyes was a look of gladness.

"Thank God you are safe," cried Reginald.

"Are your father and mother anxious?" asked Jabez.

"I think not; when I heard the storm I quieted them by telling them you had gone a long walk, for they feared you were both on the lake. Were you in great danger, and who is the young lady who came with you?"

"We'll talk about the danger to-morrow; the young lady is the one we saw last evening."

Reginald tried to get Jabez to talk about her, but he could not, and soon afterwards they arrived at the hotel. when, after giving an explanation to Mr. and Mrs. Ashton, the young minister retired, and quickly fell asleep.

Margaret, however, could not sleep, for the face of a beautiful girl haunted her, and she fancied the young minister regarded her with dislike.

CHAPTER XVII.

VIOLET VERNER.

When Jabez woke next morning, he felt stiff and sore. The over-strained muscles and the excited nerves were now suffering a severe reaction. His dreams during the night had been anything but pleasant. Time after time he had fancied himself sinking in the deep waters, and there had always seemed to be some awful power at the bottom dragging him down amongst weird creatures and loathsome crawling things, and when he tried to exert himself there was always a weight upon his limbs, and a deadening power chilling his nerves that would not allow him to move.

Breakfast had been brought to his room, for he had been informed by Mrs. Ashton on the night before, in a motherly way, that he was not to appear until eleven o'clock the next morning. He did disobey that lady to a certain extent, however, for about half-past ten he found his way to the lawn, and lay down on the green grass near the spot where the whole family of the Ashtons were quietly conversing.

"Good!" exclaimed Reginald, as he saw him appear. "Here comes the talk of the village of Windermere. They say, Easterbrook, home in Yorkshire, that there is neither courage nor strength among parsons, but you have destroyed the idea totally. Here are you, who have not been here above two days, applauded as a hero. I have been down to the landing-stage and the wildest stories are afloat. The

people say you have faced death in its most awful forms to save this lady. That you swam out of a whirlpool with Miss Verner in your arms, that you carried her nearly a mile through the woods in order to get to a boatman's house, and many more stories of a most flattering kind. And after all this here you are, well and strong, apparently, ready for a similar adventure. But come, tell us all about it from beginning to end, so that we may know whether you are really such a hero as you are reported to be."

"You really must excuse me," replied Jabez; "besides, there's nothing to tell. I was simply fortunate in getting ashore myself, and assisting the young lady ashore."

During this talk Margaret had been nervously pulling a daisy to pieces; nevertheless, not a word escaped her hearing. She was rather pale this morning, and there were dark circles around her eyes. Her mother had noticed this, and when she inquired the cause was told that it was on account of a bad headache.

She had spent a wretched night. Her love for the young minister seemed to quiver in every fibre of her being. Margaret was not a girl that could deal in half measures. Her nature was very intense. She had said that if ever she did love a man it would be with her whole being, and that her whole life should be given to him. Now she found that she did love a man whom she had tried to dislike, and whom she had treated with contempt. It had been revealed to her in a terrible way, and at a terrible time. No words can express what she felt as she walked alone, and heard the terrible sobbing waters and the howling winds. The thought of her newly-found love struggling in the deep had led her to pray, she who had not prayed for years. When the boatmen had told her there was but little hope for anyone in such a storm, the pang that shot through her heart was terrible. She had waited hour after hour by the landing-stage, when Reginald had entreated her to go with

him to the hotel; she had watched during the roaring of the storm, watched while it abated, and looked with eager eyes for any and every object that might appear. It was she who encouraged the boatmen to go out and see whether help could be rendered, and when she heard the shouts of joy her heart wildly responded; but when she saw that the young minister supported a strange but beautiful girl, and when she had been told that he had risked his life to save hers, then a feeling crept into her heart that was indeed hard to bear. It would be natural for him to be interested in this stranger whom he had saved. He had been struck by her beautiful face only two days ago, and had expressed his feelings to her brother, and now after rendering her such a service, what would be more natural than that an acquaintance should be formed which would probably ripen into friendship, and then to love? How could it be otherwise? Kindness begets kindness, as love begets love. She had not been kind to him. Her last words before he had left her the night before had been angry and repulsive. She had often taken pains to show that she disliked him, and he, with his independent mind, would naturally resent her treatment. And now she found that she loved him so much that she would be willing to die for him, while he would possibly bestow all his thoughts and affections on another. He had loved her, of this she was almost sure, but love could not live on scorn, at least, such a love as his, and thus she had found out her love too late, and her life must be one of disappointment and regret. She would be brave, however; she would not let him see how she suffered, and would try and laugh though her heart might bleed.

So she greeted him in her usual fashion, when, after answering Reginald, he had turned to her. She politely inquired after his health, expressed a hope that he would suffer no evil consequences from his exposure and trial, and

then went on pulling daisies to pieces. There was a nervous quivering around her lips though, which would have shown to a keen observer that she was more than ordinarily excited.

The religious feeling that she had experienced as she knelt and tried to pray was gone. Her heart had seemed to open for the moment, and then close again, and now, as she sat and heard the man speak for whose life she had prayed, that, however, which had appeared to her as Providence seemed now but chance, or the working of some unknown law.

And yet she wanted to speak to him privately. She wanted to know whether he bore her any ill-will, so she wandered away to another part of the lawn thinking he might follow her.

She was not mistaken in her surmise. After talking a few minutes longer with Mr. and Mrs. Ashton he came to the spot where she stood.

"Miss Ashton," he said, "I was very rude last night; your rebuke to me was very just; will you forgive me?"

She did not expect this. She had meant to ask forgiveness, and now she was called upon to grant that for which she had intended to ask.

"I had forgotten anything you said, Mr. Easterbrook, by what followed. Surely it was I who should ask forgiveness; but for my anger you would not have gone away into danger; but for me you would not be suffering what your face tells me you are suffering now."

"Strange as it may seem, Miss Ashton, I believe God's hand was in the matter. He ever brings good, even out of evil, joy out of pain, because He loves us so. If I, in my rudeness, had not annoyed you last night, we should have gone away together in the boat, and then we know not what might have happened to us. Then I might not have saved Miss Verner's life: and her father, who now rejoices

over the restoration of his child, would be mourning over her loss."

The strong faith of the man, backed as it was by what seemed natural reason, gave her a ray of light, but the thought that immediately followed drove it away.

"But for the quarrel," she said to herself, "this girl would not have become known to him, and I should have won his love. Still, if there is a God, He is, perchance, punishing me for my want of faith."

"Easterbrook!" shouted Reginald, "here is a letter for you, and an answer is requested."

Margaret accompanied him back to her parents, who gave Jabez a letter addressed, "Jabez Easterbrook, Esq."

"Evidently the writer does not know you are a minister," laughed Reginald, "or else he has no respect for the cloth."

Jabez broke the wrapper and read as follows:

"Old England Hotel.
"August 13th, 18—.

"DEAR SIR,—I had intended calling on you this morning to personally thank you for your heroic conduct in rescuing my daughter, at the risk of your own life, from probable death. I am prevented from doing so, however, for although my child is recovering satisfactorily, she is still nervous and ill, and much as I wish to see you, I cannot leave her.

"I know I am making an almost unreasonable request; but are you well enough to call and see us to-day about three o'clock? My daughter particularly wishes it, and so do I, for no words can express the thankfulness I feel to you for what you have done for us, for God only knows how I should have borne it if I had received news of my child's death.

"I hope you have fully recovered from the effects of your exertions and sufferings of last night; and that you will grant us the favour of your presence this afternoon.

"Thanking you, as only a father can thank anyone for saving his child, and trusting to see you soon,—I am, dear sir, yours most gratefully,

"HENRY VERNER."

"Jabez Easterbrook, Esq."

The young minister threw the letter to Reginald.

"Read it," he said.

"Certainly you are in luck's way," cried Reginald, when he had read it; "of course you will go?"

"I am afraid it would seem unkind if I did not," replied Easterbrook, "but it places a fellow in such an awkward position to be thanked for doing that which no one who wasn't a brute could help doing."

"Eh, old fellow, it's very nice for you to talk in that way; but think of the joy you will have in meeting and conversing with your ideal. You know you said you wished you might see her again, and now Providence is opening up your way in the most favourable manner. I only wish I were so favoured."

Jabez looked at Margaret, but she did not seem interested in the letter or the conversation, while Mr. and Mrs. Ashton both declared they thought it best for him to accept the invitation.

Jabez, therefore, scribbled a hasty reply on a correspondence card, stating that he would be at the hotel at the time mentioned, then he and Reginald sauntered away together towards the brow of a hill from which they could overlook the lake.

Then came the testing time for Margaret. Something seemed to tell her that there was no hope for her, in clearer language than had yet been spoken. How could there be? He would that very day spend hours in the society of the girl he had saved. A girl, in all probability, beautiful and gentle. They would talk together, perhaps form

an acquaintance with her which would naturally ripen into love.

She did not remember how diffident Jabez had been in entering the society of ladies, neither did she think how improbable it was that the outcome of such a meeting should be a permanent union.

Her judgment was blinded by jealousy, and her newly-found love only brought her despair. Everything seemed to be dark, nothing told her of joy, or hope, and when just before three o'clock she saw the tall form of the young minister stride down the carriage-drive her sad feelings were by no means taken away.

Jabez had been strangely thoughtful since he had received the letter of invitation; ever and anon there was a far-away look in his eyes, as if he were possessed of some wondrous fancy, that if carried into action might alter the whole course of his life. When he got near the hotel he stopped and mused, as if undetermined whether to go on.

"This is an awkward business," he said to himself; "here am I, going to the hotel for no other purpose, that I can see, than to receive their thanks, when I would much rather that not another word should be said. However, it would seem unkind if I refused, and besides I have promised, so here goes."

He went to the door, gave his card to the servant, who took it at his request to Mr. Verner, and was ere long conducted to a private drawing-room where Mr. Verner and his daughter sat.

Mr. Verner was a man in the prime of life. Slight in build, but evidently agile and muscular. His eyes were sharp and piercing, his face indicated intelligence rather than benevolence, and yet it was stamped with a manly expression such as would lead you to trust him.

The two men shook hands very heartily, and it was evident that both were pleased with each other. Then Mr

Verner, turning to his daughter, who received Jabez with great kindness, began to express in words his thanks and his gratitude to him.

"Mr. Verner," said Jabez, before he had said many words, "before you proceed further I should like to make a request, may I?"

"Certainly," replied he, "I will grant you anything in my power."

"Well, then, please don't say anything more about last night," said Jabez, bluntly. "No words can express how glad and thankful I am at being able to do the little I did. I know all you would say, and all you feel, and believe me, I appreciate it; but *please* don't say anything more about it, or you will distress me."

"Your request is by no means easy to abide by," said Mr. Verner, "for both Violet and I were desirous to thank you, but after all, gratitude is better felt than expressed, and I shall ever treasure up in my heart the debt I owe you, and rest assured, if ever I have a chance to repay you, I shall."

At this point a servant came to the door, saying that some one desired to see Mr. Verner, thus the young lady and Jabez were left alone. She looked very pale and languid, but it was evident that she was recovering from her fright and danger of the night before. Her large blue eyes sparkled, and her voice was sweet and firm.

"I am glad to find you are improving satisfactorily," said Jabez, after two or three minutes of awkward silence.

"Yes, I am as well as ever, except that I feel a little tired."

"And will last night's squall hinder you from continuing your boating expedition?"

"I am afraid they will have to do, at least papa says he shall not allow me to go out alone."

"Then I hope he will take you," said Jabez, "for I think rowing to be one of the chief enjoyments at Windermere.

Of course, there is mountain climbing, but many do not care for that."

"Papa does not care for the water. He can neither row nor swim, and says that he can see no pleasure in pulling a boat along."

"Is it not a fact that we generally see no meaning in that in which we cannot participate? I have ever found it to be so in my own life. When we stand outside a circle, we are often led to think there is nothing inside."

She looked at him wonderingly, and then her eyes sparkled with intelligence as she grasped his meaning.

"I think you are right," she said. "When I was a child I tried to read Wordsworth's poems. I could not understand them, and so, for years, I fancied that there was really nothing in them; but a year ago I was staying at this hotel, and it was very wet weather, so I thought I would try and read that great writer again. To use your figure, I think I entered just a little, at all events, into his circle, and now I can see a wondrous meaning in what he wrote."

The young minister's face beamed with pleasure. He found not only a kindred spirit, but a kindred mind. As a foxhound pricks up his ears when he hears the bugle cry, so did the young minister become interested when he heard anything that savoured of philosophy.

"Do you think that applies to all the hollow pleasures of life?"

"Yes, I think it does. That is, to a certain extent. I do not think any pleasure is hollow altogether. I often think when I hear people talk about the hollow pleasures of the world, that they have never thought about what they have been saying, for hollowness can contain nothing."

"Still the general meaning is correct, I think. Yours is a metaphysical distinction, and will not appeal to the ordinary mind. Take dancing, for instance; is not the pleasure some find in dancing hollow?"

"I think not. I will admit it is a light, and in some respects a low, kind of pleasure. But when I was at school I was taught dancing, and I can scarcely tell you of the pleasure I found in it. I have since come to the conclusion that it is by no means the highest kind of pleasure, but I can quite see how many are so fond of it. I presume you have not entered that circle—to use your own figure—and hence you cannot understand or see its enjoyments, just as papa can see no pleasure in boating."

It was rather strange that they should have talked on such questions as these when they knew so little of each other, and yet it is generally the case that cultured minds, unless poisoned by low and debased thoughts, will not be content to dwell upon idle and frivolous gossip. Thus it was that for several minutes they conversed together, each finding in the other indications of true worth and goodness, and when Mr. Verner returned he found them engaged in earnest conversation.

I think it was Professor Huxley, in one of his lay sermons, when pleading for the higher education of women, who said that a pretty girl's face would look none the worse, neither would her curling hair look anything less beautiful for having her brains cultured, and that it was saddening to see beautiful faces often expressionless and powerless on account of the little attention that had been paid to the mind. Jabez had found in conversing with Violet Verner a young lady, not only possessing rare endowments in respect to face and figure, but he found one whose heart and head had been alike the objects of care and attention, and he was almost sorry when Mr. Verner interrupted their conversation.

"Violet," he said, "I am glad to see you so much better. Would you like to go for a drive, that is, do you think you are well enough?"

"Quite well enough," she replied quickly.

"Then, Mr. Easterbrook, will you favour us with your

company for a drive as far as Ambleside, and then come back and dine with us?"

"Thank you," replied Jabez, "if I should not thereby be trespassing on your kindness too far."

"Look here," said Mr. Verner heartily, "I wanted to say two or three things to you just now, but you, in your impetuosity, would not let me. I cannot, after what you have done for us, treat you like a stranger. You are here, I suppose, for a rest and a holiday, attracted by the beauty of the scenery. So are we. And I want you, if you will, to regard us as your friends, not only while you are here, but always, for had it not been for you, I doubt if ever I should have another happy day. Come," said Mr. Verner, wiping away the moisture that had gathered in his eyes, "will you accept my friendship?"

"Gladly," cried Easterbrook, recognising the true genuine tones in which he spoke.

"Then give me your hand, and don't talk about trespassing on my kindness."

Soon after they rode away together, enjoying the beauty of wooded hills, rugged peaks, and sparkling waters. The whole scene to Jabez was like a fairy land, and the gentle maiden who sat by his side looked like some bright beautiful inhabitant thereof.

"I wonder whether old Diogenes would have seen beauty in this scene?" said Easterbrook, quietly.

"Perhaps he never lived within the circle of beauty," she replied, smilingly. "And yet," she continued after a pause, "I don't think the figure altogether true. I see no truth, no beauty, no hope, no light, no satisfaction in Atheism. Does it follow that if I stood within the circle of unbelief I should see what I don't see? I have a cousin in Liverpool —my home is in Liverpool—who has given up all belief in God, in the Bible, in Heaven; do you think if I stood within his circle, I should see as he sees?"

"I have no doubt if you stood within his circle you would not see the things he does not see. Atheism is, as it appears to me, a negative matter. Because atheists are blind to spiritual things they cannot see them, and think others are like themselves. It does not follow because we go within the circle of Wordsworth, or Shakespeare, or Comte, that we are within the circle of truth. When we enter their circle we see with their eyes, and think to a great extent with their minds. At the same time we may be very far from the centre of truth."

"And what do you think is the centre of truth?"

"There is a little book I often read which tells me of a Man who says, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.'"

"That Man was Jesus Christ."

"Yes."

"And who do you conceive Jesus Christ to be?"

"God."

"Pardon me, Mr. Easterbrook. I don't know why I am talking to you in this way. I never talk with anyone abou these matters except my cousin George, and he, I told you, is an atheist. Papa says that women can't argue, so I never dare to talk about these things with him. But George is very sharp in his mode of talking, and very decided in his views, and he makes me think sometimes that there can't be any God. Are you sure there is a God, Mr. Easterbrook?"

"Yes," abruptly, almost sternly.

"How? I wish I were sure," she said, eagerly.

"How am I sure that there is a young lady I know as Miss Violet Verner?"

"Because you see me."

"The same answer applies to your question." The man was lost to his immediate surroundings, and as for a moment he looked on the hills and the lake, he seemed to see something beyond them all. "The soul sees as the eyes see, the

soul feels as the hand feels," he continued quietly, "only the soul must be alive."

"I think I understand you."

"'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' 'He that believeth on the Son hath life.'"

It may seem strange to some that they should have begun to talk on such a subject, and yet I think a thoughtful person can scarcely look on the beautiful scenes in Cumberland and Westmoreland without being led from nature to nature's God.

"I never have met with anyone who talks like you," she said. "Most business men, that is, lawyers, doctors, merchants, seem to have but little time for these things except on Sundays."

"I am not a business man," said Jabez quietly.

"No?" and she looked at him curiously.

"I am a minister."

She looked at his tourist's clothes for a moment wonderingly, and then said joyously:

"You are a clergyman, then. Oh, I am so glad."

"No! I am not regarded as a clergyman; I am a Dissenting minister."

She looked at him wonderingly, almost sadly.

"A Dissenting minister," she said; "I thought they were an ig—that is, I thought they were altogether different from you."

Jabez was silent.

"I never spoke to one before," she said, "and I always conceived them to be like what Charles Dickens describes Mr. Stiggins in his *Pickwick Papers*."

"But they are not, neither do I ever remember seeing anyone like that renowned character."

"Oh, but I wish you did belong to the Church of England."

"Why, Miss Verner?"

"It would be so much better."

"Why?"

"Well—I don't know, except it seems the right Church, and—well, I have been led to believe that Dissenters were —that is, they were not—"

"You have never entered the circle, I see," he said smilingly. "Don't mistake me, Miss Verner. I admire the Church of England very much. Her piety, her works, her learning, her devotion. Only I believe the Bible to teach me such truths that I could not conscientiously join that Church. We have religious liberty, and must act according to our convictions. I have a friend in Yorkshire who is a curate, a splendid fellow he is, too. I admire him, and much of his belief, at the same time I am a Nonconformist and believe in its principles."

Mr. Verner, who had been talking with the driver, now turned and joined in their conversation.

An hour later they returned home to the hotel, and just as they were getting out of the carriage, Jabez saw Reginald and Margaret together. An introduction soon took place, and evidently Reginald was much charmed with the beauty of Violet Verner, while Margaret eyed her critically.

They conversed together a few minutes on the lawn, when Reginald said they must return to their hotel, expressing the hope that they might meet again.

"I hope so, too," said Mr. Verner. "We thought of going to Helvellyn on Monday, can you not join us?"

"We shall be delighted," cried Reginald, "indeed, we had made up our mind to go, provided Easterbrook was strong enough."

"No fear of that, I think," said Mr. Verner, looking at the young minister's great stalwart form, "so it is arranged."

"All right," said Reginald. "The first boat on Monday morning for Ambleside and then Helvellyn."

"And then Helvellyn," repeated Mr. Verner.

Then the party separated.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EAVESDROPPING.

It was ten o'clock when the young minister arrived at the Hydropathic, and on being asked by Mrs. Ashton whether he had spent a pleasant time, he declared that never to his knowledge had he enjoyed himself more. Mr. Verner had done his utmost to make him feel at home, and certainly he had succeeded.

Mr. Ashton rallied him upon his acquaintance with the beautiful stranger, and asked him if he intended bringing home a wife to Heathertown; but Jabez only replied in a tone of banter, without giving them any positive information.

After some pleasant, genial talk they retired to rest, or rather they went to their rooms declaring that such was their intention. It cannot be truly said, however, that Margaret had any thought of going to bed. No sooner did she enter her room, than she threw herself on a sofa, and lay for minutes almost motionless; then she started up and walked quickly to and fro the room.

"I must be mad," she muttered. "Why should I trouble about him or about her? Let her have him! Let him love her! They seem fit for each other; but why should my life be made miserable?" She stopped before the glass and saw her fine face reflected therein.

"And so she is preferred to me, is she? She with her doll's face, and her simpering manner. And yet she has a

face that a man would naturally love. Men like him must prefer a gentle confiding creature like she, to me, for I have been anything but kind to him. But I did not know, I did not know!"

She turned her head and listened. Surely it was a footstep she heard. Easterbrook's room was not far from hers, neither was Reginald's; perhaps one of them was visiting the room of the other. She heard a knock at a door, and then a voice speak.

"Easterbrook," it was Reginald who spoke, "can I come in and have a chat a few minutes, old fellow?"

She heard an affirmative reply, then the door opened, and Reginald and Easterbrook were together.

"I wonder what they are talking about," she mused; "about her, of course. Always about her, I know. And yet why should they and why should I be constantly thinking about her? It was only by chance that he rescued her, and having done so, it is only natural that they should be friendly one with another. There is no reason why he should care for her; but he does, I am sure, and I—I hate her. I am sure I do."

Then a desire came into her heart to know what her brother and Easterbrook were talking about, a desire so strong that she felt tempted to go to the door and listen. At first her finer nature recoiled from such an action, and she decided not to do so; but as time after time the temptation came with renewed force, she began to yield. She had naturally a high-toned moral nature; but it had not been much under religious influences, and she began to think there could be no harm in listening to that which she was sure Reginald would tell her the next day if she asked him. Besides, she did want to know if Jabez loved this strange girl, or if he felt any interest in her that was more than ordinary, and so she crept softly along the passage to Easterbrook's door.

Do not be too hard on her, reader. Love has a strange power over us. I will admit that some young ladies who have frittered away their hearts in innumerable flirtations, may not have much sympathy with her. They are not capable of a deep, strong feeling such as Margaret felt, for she had never loved before. Neither will shallow, insipid girls without a soul regard her in a favourable light. No doubt they will be very much shocked, and will declare that no true lady would do such a thing. But those who know what it is to realise a deep absorbing passion, and to have a jealous nature withal, will understand something of what Margaret felt. Indeed, I do not think she fairly realised what she was doing. Her whole soul had gone out after this man, whom she had thought she disliked, and now she wanted to know whether she had a rival or no. I said that love has a strange power over us, and it is true. Margaret had not been of a jealous disposition in past years, at least she thought she had not; but her love had stirred all the latent jealousy of her nature, and for a time it seemed to have mastered her. I do not wish to excuse her, indeed, I wish that her better nature had been sufficiently strong to have withstood the temptation; at the same time, before we condemn her, let us consider all things as fairly as we can.

Outside the door of Easterbrook's room she paused. She heard a murmuring inside, but she did not for a minute try to catch the purport of their conversation. Somehow she could not, she knew not why, but playing the eavesdropper seemed very mean just then, and she was turning away to go back to her room again, when she heard the deep, strong tones of Easterbrook's voice, and her attention was instantly arrested.

"Yes, yes, Reginald," she heard him say, "you laugh at me, and spout your own romantic views. You want to know my feelings towards Miss Verner. I can scarcely tell you. She is very beautiful, very intelligent, and very lov

able. I repeat it, a thousand things tell you this as you talk with her."

"I quite admit that she is beautiful," said Reginald, "and from what I saw of her to-day, I should say she was very charming. Still I can scarcely understand you. During the year you have been in Heathertown, I have scarcely ever heard you speak of young ladies. Indeed, by many you were considered rude to them. Miss Brooklyn thought you were, and if I mistake not, Margaret thought you were. And yet here are you quite enthusiastic in your praises of this girl. One might think that you thought of marrying."

"And why may I not think of marrying?"

"You marry? Quiet, self-sufficient, woman avoider, you settle down as a married man?"

"Ay, Reginald, I wish I could."

"Wish you could? To whom, Miss Verner?"

"You laugh, old man; but none but those who live in lodgings, can tell of the dreary, weary life it is. No words can express how lonely I have been during the long winter evenings. I have read, and thought, and puzzled, until brain and heart have been weary. I have gone out alone in the cold, cheerless nights, on your rugged Yorkshire hills, and then come back, weary in body, and weary in mind too, for that part; but the mind would not rest. Many a night have I lain awake, puzzled with many doubts, and yet have had no one to whom I could tell them, until I have thought that no one can be more lonely than a bachelor in lodgings."

"You lonely, Easterbrook?"

"Lonely, yes. Many a day I have passed, and have spoken to no one but my landlady, when she has brought my simple meals to me, until I have wanted, no one knows how badly, to run away. I know what many would say. Go out and see the members of the church. Yes, I have done that, and have felt how necessary have been my visits to the sick people; but to go among those who are well and

strong, and who care only for gossip, has done me but little good, I can assure you. And there are times when you can't visit, you can't speak a cheery word, you can't pray; and then I have longed for some gentle, loving, confiding companion, about whom I could think, and whom I could love, and who would be a comfort to me in the weary hours."

"Poor old Easterbrook!"

"Yes, yes, Reginald, you jocularly console with me; but I speak the truth. Sometimes I think I am very selfish, and tell myself that I should not want any one to think about but the members of my church; that I should need no joy but the joy which may be found in doing my duty. I think I do care for the church, and I do find pleasure in doing my duty; at the same time, one needs a companion. I tell you, Reginald, I feel that there is a meaning in those words in the book of Genesis, which says, 'It is not good that the man should be alone!'"

"Yes, you have conceived an attachment for this beautiful stranger whom you have saved; to use the common term, you have fallen in love."

"Fallen in love? I wish I had."

"Wish you had, man? You have, and badly, too; you have a natural claim on her affections, go and ask her to become Mrs. Easterbrook."

"And be refused. No, Reginald, she in all probability does not care for me, and if she did it would be mean in me if I were to ask her to be my wife."

"Mean, how?"

"For two reasons. First, because she fancies she is under an obligation to me. Second, because if she were to consent, I should have to take her away from all the refinements and luxuries of her home to the miserable poverty in which I may possibly be all my life."

"How do you know she's been reared in luxury?"

"Her every action indicates it, not ostensibly, but one cannot help seeing that her life has been spent amidst luxurious refinement."

"Of what business is her father?"

"He is a shipowner. At least that is what I gathered from his conversation, and they live in one of the most aristocratic parts of Liverpool."

"Indeed. Well, Easterbrook, this visit seems to be turning out strangely, and what is the greatest wonder to me is, that both you and I should be so interested in this fair stranger. No sooner did we see her than she became the subject of conversation, and she has been so ever since. Besides, I have dim forebodings as to the future."

"Have you? so have I. Somehow the conviction has laid hold of me that she is to take a prominent place in working out my life's destiny."

Margaret had listened up to this point, and had been almost unconscious that she had been listening. There had been a spell in the minister's voice which held her when she was moving away, and she had listened ever since, at the same time scarcely knowing what she did. But those words, "she is to take a prominent place in working out my life's destiny," had brought her to herself, and without waiting another second she hurried to her room, closed the door, and sat down to think.

She had heard nothing in particular. The most explicit of Easterbrook's statements were vague, but their very vagueness impressed her, and her heart was as heavy as lead, while her brain was all dizzy and confused. For a long time she sat perfectly motionless, then she started up and walked up and down the room.

"Is it a punishment for treating both him and his religion with scorn, I wonder?" she mused. "Is God causing me this pain because I have disobeyed Him?"

Perhaps in this Margaret was not so far from the truth.

Some natures need to be hardly dealt with in order that they may be softened. If Margaret had never had a disappointment, she would probably have been more arrogant than she was, and this feeling which now surged within her bosom led her to think thoughts which would otherwise have been strangers to her. Only the night before, when she feared Easterbrook might be drowning, she had been led to pray, not for herself, but for him, and now a great desire came into her soul to pray, not for him, but herself.

How many have been led to pray through sorrow and disappointment, and how many have been led to think of the real meaning of life through feelings of despair!

It was so with Margaret. Those words of Easterbrook's, "somehow the conviction has laid hold of me that she is to take a prominent place in working out my life's destiny," seemed to her like a death knell, and the future looked terribly dark.

"But I'll fight it down," she mused, "I'll crush this feeling which has gripped my being and rise above it."

Such was her determination, and through the long hours of the night she tried to destroy every feeling of love which surged in her heart; but she might as well have tried to stop the torrents of a mighty river. She was not one who did things by halves, and the whole strength of her life seemed to have gone out after this man, and so she fought against her feelings in vain.

When morning came sleep visited her weary eyelids; but when the rising bell rang she was unrefreshed, and a great weight seemed to rest on her heart.

Towards the afternoon of that day there were two fresh arrivals. The first that came was Miss Brooklyn, who seemed to absorb the whole of Margaret's attention, and whose laugh was often heard as they talked together. Then came Fred Warren, who was in high spirits, for he expected to enjoy much of the society of the one he had loved so

long. He seemed much amused at Reginald's account of Jabez's gallantry, and tried to poke fun at him; but Jabez accepted his sallies quite coolly, and returned them with such interest that the petted man of society was glad to cease his banter. When evening came four of the young people took a walk among the hills; but Jabez did not accompany them; they were even in number, he said, and at best he should be an odd man, so as he was rather tired he would spend his evening quietly at home.

Warren seemed delighted with this arrangement, neither did Reginald appear to be displeased, and it was with a peculiar smile upon his lips that Easterbrook watched the party as they walked away.

During the walk Warren's joyous feelings seemed to know no bounds; he laughed and talked to that degree that Reginald seriously considered as to whether he were not slightly intoxicated.

But the truth was, Margaret had greeted him kindly, and he fancied it augured well for the success of his suit. Nearly a year had passed away since he had been told he might ask for her hand again at the end of a year, and when he had met her she had been so kind and subdued, that he felt sure his object was attained. He fancied, too, that he had felt her hand tremble as she shook hands with him, and as her kindness had continued during the walk he was quite jubilant.

Nothing happened during the walk of any consequence, save a resolve that had formed itself in Warren's mind, and which he determined to carry into effect that very night. Consequently when they returned to the hydropathic, just as the shades of the night were falling, he asked Mr. Ashton whether he might be favoured with a short interview.

"Certainly," said Mr. Ashton, and led the way to a private sitting-room.

"You will be aware, sir," said Warren, "that about a year

ago I asked you for your daughter's hand, and was told I might renew my request again at the end of a year."

"Yes, I remember," said Mr. Ashton.

"I come to ask your permission to renew that request."

"Why," said Mr. Ashton kindly, "do you think after due consideration that Margaret is the wife to make you happy?"

"I do, indeed, sir. I love her so much that I cannot help being happy in her society."

"But have you any reason to think your suit will be more favourably received than it was twelve months ago?"

"I think so, sir. She treats me far more kindly than she did then, and this afternoon when I came I thought she seemed very glad to see me. I am in hopes, sir, that my long devotion has won her heart."

"Look here, Warren, my boy," said Mr. Ashton, kindly; "years ago I will not deny the fact that I thought Margaret and you might suit each other. Now, I don't. Neither do I think she is favourably disposed to you now. I have not asked her, mind, neither has she told me, but that is my impression. Nevertheless, I shall not try and dictate either to you or her. You have come to me in an honourable way, and, therefore, I again give my consent for you to renew your request."

Thus ended the interview, and although Warren was slightly disconcerted by Mr. Ashton's plain talking, he was still joyous, for he felt sure that no one with whom Margaret was acquainted could be compared with him.

That night, before retiring to rest, Mr. Ashton called Margaret to him.

"My child," he said, "Mr. Warren has sought an interview with me this evening, to ask me again to give my consent for him to renew his suit for your hand in marriage."

"Oh, papa," she said.

"I thought I would tell you so that you might not be taken unawares."

"And you, papa, what have you said to him?"

"I consented, Margaret. Look here, do not think—"

But Margaret was gone; she had flown like a startled bird away to her own room, to be alone, to think.

Mr. Ashton looked after her in surprise. "How strangely she has acted of late," he said to himself; "does she really care for him after all?"

Again Margaret spent almost a sleepless night, for she was strangely excited. She was thinking whether she had better accept Warren. Somehow, she had become convinced that Easterbrook cared nothing for her, and she thought she might be able to crush her love for him if she consented to be the wife of another man. Hour after hour she tossed restlessly on her bed, hour after hour she tried to make up her mind to say yes to Warren's entreaty; but she could not.

"Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do?" she cried, but no answer came to her question, until she saw the grey light of the morning appear, and then she heard a sound, close to her ear, which seemed to say, "Margaret, pray!"

"I will," she cried; "I prayed once, and it did me good, and my prayer was answered: at any rate it can do no harm."

So she knelt by the side of her bed, and prayed until sobs shook her frame. By-and-bye she became more calm, and then an indescribable peace passed over her soul, although she could not decide as to what answer she should give to Fred Warren when he should again ask her to be his wife. She had prayed that she might be told what to do, and although she had but little faith in prayer, she had a vague expectation that she would get an answer.

The answer did not come in the way she expected, but she felt her spirits less oppressed, and when the breakfast bell sounded she was able to take her usual place without showing that she had spent a sleepless night.

As for Jabez, he was anxiously looking forward to the time when the party were to climb Helvellyn, for he could not get rid of the impression that it would be an important day in his history

CHAPTER XIX.

AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.

It was Monday morning. There had been a heavy shower of rain during the night, but the sun had risen in a cloudless sky, and as it shone upon the moist earth and refreshed vegetation, everything seemed to tell of gladness. Jabez felt this as he rose early and looked on the prospect before him. From his window he could see the long stretch of the lake lying between the peaceful hills, and as the gentle breezes blew, its waters shone like silver in the sunlight. He could see hill upon hill stretching away in the distance, but could not see Helvellyn, which the party agreed to climb that day; he knew, however, in which direction it lay; and as the cool morning air fanned his black locks he seemed to breathe in strength and health, and his blood surged joyously through his veins.

A little later and a party of seven wended their way to the steamboat pier. Jabez walked a little apart from the rest, for he felt that somehow he was not wanted among the younger portion of the party. He had noticed, too, that Margaret had been icily cold to him all the morning, while she seemed to receive with pleasure the attention of Warren. Reginald, too, appeared to be determined to enjoy himself as much as possible with Miss Brooklyn, so he sauntered on by himself to the steamboat pier, where, to his great pleasure, he found Mr. and Miss Verner. Shortly afterwards, the introductions having been gone through, the

party were chatting pleasantly together as they sailed up the lake. Did I say the party chatted pleasantly together? Two exceptions must be made. Margaret and Jabez. The former seemed to be strangely occupied in looking at the grand hills that loomed away in the distance; and yet, could you have read her mind, you would have known that it was not of the hills or the scenery she was thinking, but of the young minister, who appeared to be watching the swells that the boat made as it ploughed the deep waters. He had seen Miss Verner the day before, as he had been quietly walking down the banks of the lake, and had spent two whole hours with her, and as he thought of her kind, gentle words, her refined tastes, and withal of the winsomeness of her every action, he felt that the man who won her for his wife would win a treasure, and then he asked himself why he might not be the fortunate one.

When they arrived at Ambleside they were surrounded by men who were beseeching them to hire their carriages, and having secured one from a man who looked as though he would maintain his manliness rather than be clamouring as his comrades were doing, they started for Rydal Mount.

No one could be more delighted than Violet Verner as the carriage swept on by Grasmere Lake, Wordsworth's house, and many other places of interest. And having Easterbrook by her side, who pointed out to her various places worthy of notice, and related their history, she seemed to be, more than anyone, enjoying the ride.

Arrived at the point where they had to leave the road in order to climb the mountain, they hired a guide and two mountain ponies and commenced the long ascent.

They had not gone far when Jabez saw a gipsy tent, and thinking of their adventure of some months before, looked at Margaret, but she seemed entirely engrossed in a conversation with her escort and would-be husband.

After about an hour the party had become scattered.

Mrs. Ashton sat on one of the ponies, at whose head the guide stood. Close behind walked Mr. Ashton and Mr Verner, both of whom seemed to be quietly enjoying the scene. At a little distance were Reginald and Miss Brooklyn, the latter of whom was riding, but who appeared constantly to need Reginald's assistance to keep her seat. Far on ahead of the whole party was Margaret, accompanied by Warren, her black hair waving in the wind that was blowing up the hill side, while at the rear were Jabez and Violet, apparently in earnest conversation.

Up and up they went, the air getting colder, and the scene becoming more extensive and more grand, until they came to a vast hollow between the hills. The place was filled with water, and no words can describe the weirdness of the spot as the winds swept away from between the hills across the dark waters, and away down the silent valleys beyond. Hill upon hill towered around them with rugged grandeur, their bold outlines impressing most of the party with a kind of awe.

A high peak stood before them which they thought was Helvellyn, and, arrived there, they would, they knew, have an extensive view; but, after much weary climbing, they, when they reached the top of the peak, saw a height yet unattained, which was miles away.

"True to life," said Jabez to his companion, "we see a point before us, and think when we have attained to that our highest ambition will be realised; but when, after an infinite amount of labour, we have reached it, we see greater heights beyond."

"And is it not best that it should be so?" said Violet. "Would not life be a tame, poor affair if we reached a point from which there was no possibility of ascending, because we were at the top. Life would be finite, indeed, then, and because finite, poor; but it is grand to think we need never cease to climb, never cease to develop."

"Yes," said Jabez, "greater heights mean greater enjoyments, greater capacities for life; indeed, more of life. Come, let us go on, I want us to be the first to reach the summit.

On the party went until they stood on the highest peak, and having arrived there, they gave a long look at the wild scenery around them. Away in the distance was the shining sea, while between them and the sea and all around them were the giant hills of Cumberland and Westmoreland. Here and there was a patch of wood, as if to relieve the ruggedness of the huge rocks that towered their heads towards the sky, while again the scene was made more picturesque by the shadows of the light, fleecy clouds which were spread along the sky. Nestled among the hills were miniature lakes, all possessed of bewitching beauty, while close to their banks was luxuriant foliage, a wondrous contrast to the brown heather and grey, weather-beaten rocks hundreds of feet above.

Easterbrook and Violet stood side by side, her hand resting lightly upon his arm. She had been glad of his help during the ascent, and when they had arrived at the top she had let her hand remain, not noticing the fact that Margaret was watching her closely.

I am afraid Margaret did not much enjoy the scenery. She had in the morning accepted Warren's escort, and had tried to forget her sad thoughts by talking to him; but she found his conversation so little in accord with the objects by which they were surrounded, that she was obliged to be, what appeared to Warren, taciturn and moody. Often she caught herself watching Jabez and his companion, and she realised a bitter feeling in her heart as she saw how they appeared to enjoy themselves. Sometimes she had managed to get close to them, and had heard snatches of their conversation, and although there was nothing in what she heard that had a tendency to arouse her feelings, she felt

madly jealous that Miss Verner should have a man for her companion, while she only had a mere pigmy. And yet she had been seriously considering whether she should not promise to be the wife of the one she could not help despising, for had not the young minister seemed to forget her, and become altogether devoted to the young girl he had saved from a watery grave? It certainly seemed so, as he stood by her side looking at the surrounding hills; and in her despair she almost determined to answer Warren in the affirmative, when he should ask her to be his wife.

The party had not stood on the top of Helvellyn long, however, before they wanted to descend again. The air was bitterly cold, although it was at the height of summer, and they, being thinly clothed, felt it keenly. Their attention had been drawn, also, by Warren, to a large cloud that was appearing in the horizon, and which betokened a storm; so, without having refreshments on the summit of the mountain, which they intended to do, they hurried homeward as fast as possible. Scarcely a quarter of an hour passed before they were enveloped in a cloud of mist, and they were obliged to remain close to the guide, for they soon lost all idea of their whereabouts.

"Are we returning the same way as we came?" asked Jabez of the guide.

"No, sir, a nearer, quicker way to the high road," was the answer; and Jabez noticed that there was a touch of anxiety in the guide's voice.

"Is there any danger?" he asked him in a low voice.

"I think not, sir," was the answer, "but it looks as though a storm were coming on, and a storm's not pleasant in these parts, sir, whether it be summer or winter."

A few minutes later a sound was heard sweeping across the hills like the wail of a monster in pain, then the party felt huge rain drops fall on them, and heard a rumbling away in the distance.

"Hurry on! hurry on!" cried the guide.

The dark cloud which Warren had first seen had by this time covered the sky and made it of inky blackness, and those who kept close to the guide without counting to see if the party were all together, rushed on.

Then the hills were suddenly enveloped in darkness, and the rain fell in torrents. Most of the ladies, however, had mackintoshes, with which they enveloped themselves, and the sure-footed ponies bore two of the ladies easily, yet rapidly, towards the distant valley.

"Is there no house in which we can rest until the storm is over?" cried Mr. Ashton.

"Down further, sir," cried the guide, "but there is a good deal of rough road to get over first. Make haste, sir, the storm is not at its height yet."

On they clambered, over rocky paths and through the boggy soil.

"I wonder where Warren and Miss Ashton are?" said Jabez to himself, looking around him. "I can't see them at all; but I daresay they are all right, for Warren is not the fellow to keep far from the guide if there is any danger near." Then, turning to his companion, he said, "Are you tired, Miss Verner?"

"A little," was the reply.

"I think it is almost your turn to ride; Miss Brooklyn has had the pony nearly all the time, and you have been tramping over these paths, which are by no means smooth."

"And have preferred it, Mr. Easterbrook."

"I am glad you have," he said. "And I trust you have had a pleasant day."

"It could not be other than pleasant," she replied, cheerily.

"Although it does not promise to end pleasantly; tramping through this dark, terrible weather is not a pleasant way of finishing the day that promised to be so beautiful."

"It's only a little variation," she said, with a mirthful smile.

For several minutes after this, conversation was nearly impossible, for a rocky path over which they had to go required much care. The stones were as slippery as glass, and the darkness caused by the howling storm made it dangerous.

"How much further to the house?" cried Mr. Ashton.

"Ten minutes more," cried the guide.

"Oh, it's terrible, terrible," cried Miss Brooklyn. "Please, please, Mr. Reginald, keep close to me."

And Reginald, thinking of the little use Miss Verner had made of the pony, for whom it was especially hired, looked rather scornfully at Miss Brooklyn, who sat on it, and went quietly by the pony's head.

"Is there any danger, man?" she screamed to the guide.

"Don't know, miss," was the unassuring answer of the guide, to whom she had been very dictatorial, and who somewhat resented her tones of authority.

Presently the path became better, and ere long the guide gave a joyful shout

"Yon is the house," he cried.

"Are we far from the high road, now?" asked Mr. Ashton.

"A good distance, sir; but the road's good all the way."

They came up to the house. A cottage built up on the side of the hill, said by many to stand on higher ground than any other house in England. They entered the dusky kitchen, where a woman received them in a manner half kind, half surly.

Are we all here?" said Mrs. Ashton, who, with motherly interest, was anxious lest any should be left behind.

Mr. Ashton looked around the room.

"No," he cried; "Fred Warren and Margaret have not come."

"They are close behind, no doubt," replied Reginald.

"Warren's a cautious fellow, and does not often get into danger."

Jabez thought of his encounter with Carlo, and smiled.

He went to the door, and looked out on the storm-swept hills, and tried, through the blinding rain, to see the missing couple, but could discern nothing. Presently he thought he heard a shout above the roar of the storm.

"Halloo!" he cried.

Clearly and distinctly he heard the answering shout.

"All is safe," he said, speaking to those inside. "I hear Mr. Warren's voice."

There was an expression of thankfulness among all present, for it seemed that all cause for anxiety was gone. In a minute more, Easterbrook, who kept his watch at the door, saw the outline of a single figure.

"Mr. Warren?" he shouted.

"Yes," was the reply, and Warren came up to the cottage panting, frightened, and—alone.

"Where is Miss Ashton?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know? Why are you here without her?"

"Because she wished me to leave her."

"And you did?"

"Yes."

"In this terrible storm?"

"What could I do? Besides, the storm was not so bad then."

"Where did you leave her?"

"On the top of the mountain above 'The Tarn.'"

The blood boiled in Easterbrook's veins, his heart throbbed violently.

"Leave a woman, in such a place, in such weather, alone," he muttered, "miserable cur."

"Come, none of that, Easterbrook," was the reply

"She insulted me; she told me she wanted to be alone—and—"

"What is the matter?" cried Mr. Ashton, coming to the door.

Both were silent.

"Come, come; what's the meaning of this?" he said, excitedly; then, noticing that Warren was alone, he asked for Margaret.

"She would not come along with me," said Warren, sullenly.

"Would not! Why?"

"Come here, sir, and I'll you."

They stood at the end of the house that was somewhat sheltered, and they spoke in low tones together, while Jabez watched them with flashing eyes and lowering brow.

"One word more," said Easterbrook to Warren, when Mr. Ashton left him; "did she say which way she was coming, that is, did she tell you the way she intended going home?"

"She said she could return by the same road we came," said Warren, sullenly.

Mr. Ashton went to the guide, without telling his wife or the rest of the party what was the matter.

"My daughter was left on the top of the hill above that tarn, and she said she intended returning home by the same route as we came. Do you think she could manage to return safely alone?"

"The lady with the long black hair floating over her back, and the black eyes, sir?" said the man.

"Yes."

"She seems to have pluck enough for anything; but the storm made everything dark, and, as you know, the road's a ticklish one."

"Then come with me, and we will save her."

The man looked at the storm that swept with terrific force up the valley.

"All right, sir," he said, "I am willin' to go; but do you think we can do any good? It is easy to miss any one on such a path in such weather; besides, we must get to the other path, on the other side of the hill."

"Come on, never mind where we have to go. I must look for my child," cried the father, and his voice was full of anguish.

"Couldn't one of the younger ones go with me?" said the guide. "You are as good as done up now."

"Why, who could go with you as well as I could? I don't want them to know but as little as possible indoors, and Warren is no use, the poor wretch."

"Couldn't that tall, black-haired gentleman, who saved the young lady the other night, go with me; he seems a chap as ud face or dare anything. Excuse me, sir, you'd be no good, you are quite wore out."

"No, no, I'm not; but where is Mr. Easterbrook?"

Warren, who had stood in a little shed beside the ponies, looking sullenly on the ground, answered,

"He's gone, Mr. Ashton."

"Gone! Gone where?"

"He said he was going to find Miss Ashton."

They looked over the brow of a hill that rose close by them, and dimly saw the form of a man battling with the storm.

"He's gone to the other path," said the guide; "he'll find her if any one can, he's just the chap to do it."

"Thank God, he's strong and able to go," cried Mr. Ashton, "for I feel I cannot;" and then he staggered, and would have fallen had not the guide caught him.

"You are ill, sir," said the guide.

"No, no," and then he fainted through exhaustion and excitement.

Meanwhile, the ladies, save Violet, knew nothing of what had happened, and she, who had spent such a happy day

with the minister, watched him as he strode over the rough hillside, and wondered if he would be successful in his journey, and prayed that he might. And he—he scarcely knew what he was doing, save that he was trying to find and bring back safe one by whom he thought he was despised; and with that thought he battled with the storm, and rushed up the precipitous pathway towards the weird tarn that lay in the distance, and whose dark waters had so impressed him in the morning.

CHAPTER XX.

GOD IN THE STORM.

It will be necessary to turn back a little, or the reader may pass such a judgment on Warren as he does not deserve. As we know, Margaret felt anything but happy on the top of Helvellyn, as she saw Violet Verner, looking as beautiful as the first spring rose, her cheeks tinted with a beautiful hue, owing to the exercise she had been taking and the sweet mountain air which she had been breathing. And as she saw how animated and full of intelligence Easterbrook's face was, and how happy he seemed as he talked with his beautiful companion, she felt madly jealous. She watched them go away together, and then, scarcely knowing what she did, accepted Warren's proffered arm, and kept in the rear while the party descended.

She thought little or nothing about the storm that threatened them; she thought nothing of the cloud of mist by which they were surrounded, and only answered in monosyllables to Warren's remarks, until they got some distance from the summit of the mountain. Then Warren broached a subject that had a terrible interest to her.

"Miss Verner is very beautiful, is she not?"

"Yes, I think so," she said.

"Ay, and Easterbrook thinks so too, if I am not mistaken."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I think it's very patent. See the attention he has paid to her all the day, and she seems to appreciate it."

"Evidently you have been watching them."

"I have now and then. Do you know if she is wealthy?"

"No; why?"

"Because," said Warren, "Easterbrook will be a fool if he marries a girl without money. I suppose he has only a few pounds a year besides his poor pittance of a salary, and for him to marry a wife without money would be sheer madness."

Margaret was silent.

"What do you think of Easterbrook, Margaret?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, what sort of a fellow do you think he is; what is your impression about him?"

"I think he is very tall and has black hair."

Warren gave over talking about Easterbrook after this; he had tried through him to lead up to a conversation by which he could naturally declare his love for her. His mind was by no means quick, he was not blessed with great conversational powers, and although he tried to think of something else to say to her, he was unable to do so. Meanwhile the dark fog gathered around them, the air became more cold, and they heard the distant rumbling of thunder.

"Let's hurry on," cried Warren, his anxiety about himself overcoming his desire to make love to Margaret; "see, the rest of the party are nearly out of sight."

"I shall not hurry," said Margaret; "you had better join them and leave me alone."

"No, no, how can you think of such a thing, how could I leave you?" he said.

He thought he saw a way opening up now by which he would be able to plead his cause again.

At that moment the storm burst upon them furiously, and Margaret instinctively clutched Warren's arm more tightly.

"There, there," said Warren, half frightened, "fancy my running away and leaving you. No, Margaret, I would like ever to remain at your side, and care for you."

She did not speak.

"Do you remember a year ago, Margaret? It is nearly a year—is it not?—since I asked you to—to try and—and care for me. You know your answer, Margaret, and I spoke to your father only a day or so ago about it, and he gave me his consent. I do love you ever so, and I don't know what I'll do if you will not have me."

"Indeed," said Margaret, absently.

It was not much encouragement, but Warren went on, thinking that surely his bliss would soon be complete.

"I don't think I am a bad fellow. I would let you do just as you wanted, and we could have a real jolly home, you know. Don't you think so, Margaret?"

She gave him no answer. She walked along by his side looking on the ground, while the wind and the rain beat angrily upon them. Still Warren talked on.

"I think you must see how I love you. I should never talk to you like this, out here on these wild hills, in this storm, unless I loved you with all my heart. Indeed, I hardly know how I have dared to speak, with all my love to help me; I don't think I should if you hadn't encouraged me."

Margaret looked angrily at him. "I've not encouraged you," she said.

"Not directly, Margaret; but indirectly you have. That is, you have been kinder and more pleasant to me since I have been at Windermere than ever I have known you. Tell me, dearest, that you will be mine."

"Would you like to have a wife who did not love you?"

"Yes, if it were you, Margaret. Even if you don't love me now, if you consented to be mine I could win your love, I am sure I could."

"How? Why?" she asked, abruptly.

"Because I love you so. Love begets love, you know Don't you love me a little now?"

She heaved a weary sigh, and looked around her. The sky looked blacker than ever, and the rain fell more heavily, but she seemed unconscious as to her surroundings. She looked as though she were weighing some dread alternative in her mind.

"Now, Margaret," said Warren, encouraged by the sigh, "you do love me a little, you know; don't you? Say you do."

She did not speak, but looked anxiously into his face.

"Why, who knows," he continued, "it may be that Easterbrook cares no more about the weather than I do, and he is asking Miss Verner to be his wife; he looked just like it, didn't he? Say yes, and there may be a double wedding."

While he was speaking a strange look passed over her face, her lips trembled, and her eyes burned with an unearthly light.

"I would rather die," she said huskily.

"What do you say?"

"I would rather die than marry you."

Her voice rose almost to a scream, and she clenched her fist nervously. The picture of Jabez asking Violet to be his wife burned in her brain like fire, and although she had been trying to say the words to Warren that would have made him happy, she now loathed his very presence.

The sound of her voice and her strange look frightened him.

"Why?" he said, scarcely knowing the meaning of his question.

"A double wedding!" she repeated, scornfully. "How the people would laugh! What a difference in the bridegrooms!"

Warren interpreted this in his own way His excessive

vanity would not allow him to think for a moment that he was not far superior to Easterbrook, and knowing Margaret's great apparent dislike for him, fancied that she was angry at the thought of him being a bridegroom with him at a double wedding.

"Why, Margaret, I only spoke in a joke. I did not mean to annoy you, and I cannot help it if Easterbrook is an awkward clown. Besides, you know," he said with a laugh, "I should show up better by the contrast."

Her eyes flashed fire.

"He an awkward clown! *You* show better by contrast? Why you, compared with him, are like a jackal by the side of a lion! Like an effeminate puppy by the side of a man! Leave me!"

"Oh, I see," said Warren, taunted by her words to a state of frenzy. "The reason you will not have me is because you love him, while he is in love with another girl."

"Leave me!" she cried, passionately.

"No, I'll stay with you and take care of you. The rest of the party are out of sight, including Easterbrook and his love. Your father knows you are in my care."

"I in your care? You take care of me? Go, I can find my way by the same way we came without your protection. A man that ran away because poor old Carlo barked cannot help me much. I'll not go another step with you!"

"But, Margaret——"

"How dare you call me Margaret! Go, leave me!"

He saw that he dared not stay any longer, and fancying he heard the sound of voices in the distance, and seeing the fresh track of a horse's hoofs, rushed on towards the sound, which was in the direction which the horse's track pointed.

Meanwhile Margaret tramped on alone. The storm was raging furiously, but she had a good idea of locality, and fancied, after walking some distance, that she saw a large rock which she had passed in the ascent. The hill here

became very steep, but she scrambled down its sides with comparative ease, owing to its being smooth and covered with a short, bushy heather. For some time after Warren had left her she did not realise her position, but kept constantly thinking of the scene through which she had passed, but as she went down and down alone she remembered where she was. The ground became very slippery, and once or twice she fell, but was fortunately unhurt. By-and bye, when she got near the bottom of this steep part of the hill, the ground became very treacherous. At each step she sunk in some deep, slimy mud, and sometimes she had a difficulty in walking at all. Then she realised her condition. Here she was alone, alone among the wild mountains. Night would soon be upon her, even now the storm had made everything dark. The thunders were rolling, while the rain was falling in torrents, and was beaten upon her by the angry winds. She had been lost to time, she did not know how long she had been away from the main party, her conversation with Warren was like a dream. She did not know of shelter anywhere. She was far away from any house. She sat down on a large rock almost in despair, while the pitiless rain beat upon her. Then, after she had rested awhile, she tried to go on again. It was for some time very difficult, but then she came to firm ground and found it easier. Presently she struck into a path again, and soon after saw the dark waters of the tarn, looking more dark and terrible now than when she had seen it in the morning. She had thought the place terribly solemn then, when the sun was shining, and when all her friends were around her, but now, as the howling wind swept over it, and the rain splashed into it, she seemed to hear wails of despair, while the great mountains, which she could dimly see through the storm, looked mockingly down upon her.

Her nerves had been excited all through the day, and now she felt like going mad.

I remember once standing by this tarn. I think it goes by the name of "Grisedale Tarn," and although the day was fine, and my companions pleasant, I felt I could not live there and retain my senses. Goethe must have thought of such a place when describing the summit of Brocken, for it is just where one would fancy the agents of darkness might hold their nocturnal revels.

Margaret sat down behind a rock that was somewhat sheltered from the wind, and for a time gave way to the feelings of terror and anguish that possessed her. Where could she go? What could she do? Warren would not come back to her, after she had insulted him so, and even if he would he could never find her. Easterbrook could not know of her position, and even if he did, he would be too happy in the company of Violet to care for her. Very likely the guide would lead them to some place of rest and shelter while she was alone in that weird, awful place, only fit to be inhabited by evil spirits.

Meanwhile the pitiless storm roared around the giant hills, which fairly seemed to smoke as the rain was beaten into spray, and soon Margaret, in spite of her mackintosh, was drenched to the skin. When her passion, caused by Warren's words, had died out, she more than ever saw the danger she was in, and in her anguish she tried to think of some means of escape and safety.

She had prayed when Jabez had been in danger, and her prayer had apparently been answered, but as she sat there alone, a thousand objections to prayer came into her mind. How or why should God save Jabez because of her petition, and would He have let him drown simply because she had not prayed? The idea was absurd. And then came the old harrowing doubt. Was there a God at all? In answer to this dread query a lurid flash of lightning almost blinded her, while rolling thunder seemed to shake the hills in their sockets. Was it God that sent it? Easterbrook had been

teaching lately that God was love, all love, and nothing but love, and that His every action was but an expression of that love. Was there any love in that storm? She could see none at all. It was to her all rage, and fury, and darkness. Could she believe that the God which sent it would help her then? Surely no. She tried to formulate a prayer; she tried to think of the little prayer her mother had taught her when a child; but her memory failed her. The past was only a black blank, the present—bitter anguish. And still the storm swept on.

She got up and looked around her, and tried to think of the way she had come, but she could discern no landmark anywhere. She had even forgotten on which side of the tarn she was, her mind was so confused. Must she die there? She, so young, so beautiful, alone amongst those dread hills, with the piteous rain beating on her face. A great dread laid hold of her. There was a hereafter, and a terrible one too, she felt it. She could not realise a God, but she could realise a devil. She could not fancy Heaven, but hell was sure enough. Still, the life within her was strong, her splendid health and vigorous system asserted itself; she would struggle, she would fight.

"I will not die so," she said; "there must be a way down and I will find it."

Her soaked clothes hung around her, making it difficult for her to walk, but she rose from her resting-place, and scrambled up a path in the direction she fancied would lead her to the main road. It was weary work. The storm, though somewhat abated, was still terrible; the night must be rapidly coming on, and she was far from any house. How long she scrambled on she did not know, she thought it must be hours, for now it was nearly dark, and it was but in the early evening when she parted from Warren. At length her strength gave way; she sank down on a great slippery rock, exhausted.

"There can be no God," she thought; "if there were, He would come and save me. Evil spirits rule the universe, evil spirits are dragging me down."

Her whole soul recoiled from this thought, however; her higher, truer nature demanded a great personal goodness. Nothing but the Eternal Goodness could satisfy even the little good in her starved spiritual nature. Although she did not know it, God was touching her then, purifying her, preparing her soul for the reception of truth, and longing that she might receive it. Even she felt that some good power was behind all, and she forgot for the moment her desolate and terrible position.

"God!" she cried, "speak to me; let me feel that Thou art, let me know that—hark! What is that?"

"Halloo!"

She heard the shout clearly and distinctly. She could not recognise the voice, however; but surely it must be some one come to save her. She tried to answer back, but the wind carried the sound in the opposite direction to that from which she heard the sound. She listened intently for some time, but could hear nothing more, and a sickening feeling crept around her heart.

"Halloo!"

There it was again, plainer and nearer this time, and the joy of hope burned within her breast; and then, looking up, she saw the form of a man battling with the storm. Was not God speaking to her in the voice of the man? Would not God be revealed to her in the presence of this man come to help her? There was life, joy, ecstacy in the thought; it was a glimpse of truth, of Heaven. God revealed to the human through the human.

"Miss Ashton!"

No doubt about it now. It was a friend; probably it was Easterbrook.

She gave an answering cry, and in a moment more

Easterbrook, drenched to the skin, panting, almost exhausted, but still hopeful, stood beside her.

"Thank God I have found you," he said. "I have been looking for you for hours, and had almost given up hope."

"How did you know I was alone?"

"Mr. Warren told me."

"Where are the rest of the party?"

"At a cottage on the other side of the hill."

"Does anyone know I am alone beside you?"

"Yes; your father, and, I think, Miss Verner."

She had asked these questions in a dazed kind of a way, scarcely without any feeling, save a vague fear lest her mother should be anxious about her. But when Easterbrook had mentioned Miss Verner's name, the old feeling of mad jealousy crept into her heart.

"Why did you come?" she said. "I could have found my way down somehow."

"I came because I knew you were in danger if left alone. Come, let me help you, it will soon be pitch dark, and the path is not plain."

He spoke quietly, but his words maddened her more.

"You can leave me," she said; "I will find my way alone."

"No, I shall not leave you."

"You refuse to leave me when I bid you."

"Certainly."

"And if I refuse to go with you?"

"You must not refuse to go with me."

"Must not, sir?"

"No, must not. Please take hold of my arm."

"Mr. Easterbrook, do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"Perfectly well, Miss Ashton. This is no time for ceremony. I know perfectly well your dislike for me, although what I have done to merit it I do not know, but I

know this as well, that you are lost among these hills, and that you cannot get down alone. I have come on purpose to take you to some place of safety, which I am going to do if it is in my power, and then I shall trouble you no longer with my society. Please take my arm."

He spoke quietly, but there was a depth of feeling in his tones which she could not mistake. She felt mastered, too, and in spite of herself, she placed her hand on his arm, and she felt herself carefully helped over the slippery path.

Presently the road became better, there were no rocks to trouble them, the ground was firm, and they were able to walk on with some degree of ease. No word was spoken for some time, for Jabez was anxious about the path, and Margaret felt in no mood for talking. At length she asked the question :

"Are you taking me to my mother?"

"No."

"Where, then?"

"I hardly know, but I think to a place where you will be able to take off your wet clothes and rest."

"But why are we not going to father and mother?"

"Because I could not find the house at which they are staying. It is on the other side of the hill, and as there is no path, it would be impossible to get there in the dark."

Again they walked on in silence, the road becoming plainer and plainer, and the storm becoming less and less severe; but Margaret was nearly exhausted. Her wet clothes made it painful for her to walk, and she almost fell to the ground.

"How much farther have we to go?" she said.

"Not much, I think," replied Jabez; "but I am not sure."

"I cannot go much farther."

"Let me try and carry you. I am strong and well able."

"Certainly not."

"I'll see what my voice can do then," he said, quietly; and then, exerting his strength to the full, he called for help.

There was no answer, save a faint echo and the wail of the wind which swept over the hills.

"If the worst comes to the worst," said Jabez, "I shall have to carry you to the main road, although it is a good distance off, but I thought I was near to it. It must be, too. I'll shout again."

But still there was no answering voice; nothing was heard save the voice of the storm, which sounded to Margaret like a death knell.

"What are you looking for, Mr. Easterbrook?" she said.

"I see a light," cried Jabez, excitedly; "that must be it, and although it is poor refuge, it is better than nothing."

He hurried her on without another word, through prickly heather and over sedgy grass, the light becoming more distinct at each step.

"I say there!" cried Jabez.

"What do yer say?" was the reply.

"We've lost our way on the hills, and are drenched with the storm. Can you give us shelter?"

"Precious little. Our tents is amoast wet through, and room is scarce. You'd better go on to the road."

"I would do, only I have a lady with me who is almost exhausted, and it is not weather for a dog to be out of doors."

"A lady, on sich a night as this, yer. I s'pose you've been on a hexplorin' tower."

He opened the door of a tent while speaking, and Jabez and Margaret, stooping almost to a double, entered. It was about twelve feet long, and half as many wide, and was fairly dry. In spite of the weather, a fire had been kept burning in the middle of the tent, and after their eyes had become accustomed to the light which was dimmed by the

smoke, they discovered that the only occupant besides the man who had let them in, was an old toothless woman. She did not look at them, however, but kept her eyes on the ruddy coals, muttering softly to herself for a few seconds, and then, with an impatient gesture, she said :

"What brings you here?"

"The storm, good mother."

"Wrong again. It was fate. We have met before. I knew we should meet again. I told you both then what has since come true. But what of that? I hate you fine-fingered gentry. I scorn your luxury, your so-called refinements. But the Hebrew sage spoke right when he said, 'Thou shalt do no murder.' Paul, the Jew, was right when he told the people to be hospitable. It would be murder to keep you in wet clothes; it would be inhospitable not to shelter you. Maiden, follow me. Lorenzo, give the youth who scorned me when away on the Yorkshire hills, dry clothing."

And the old woman led Margaret away in the darkness, while Jabez, almost dazed, fearing lest he had done wrong, yet not knowing how he could have done better, waited while the man, who was evidently the old woman's son, took from another apartment in the tent some dry clothing.

He had hardly taken off his own wet clothes and put on some rough, gipsy attire, when he heard a woman's scream, full of terror, full of pain, which evidently came from some place near at hand.

"It's Margaret's voice," cried Jabez, and he rushed into the darkness alone.

CHAPTER XXI.

GIPSY LORE.

He had not gone far when he saw, looming up darkly, a gipsy caravan, and hearing a scramble within he rushed up the steps of the conveyance, climbed to the door and knocked loudly.

"What caused that scream?" he demanded.

"Enter," cried a voice.

He entered, and found the old woman alone, sitting calmly on a stool.

"Who screamed?" demanded Jabez.

"The maiden."

"Why, what have you done to her?"

"Nothing."

The old woman answered him defiantly, and then pointed behind the door where sat two huge, black cats, their eyes shining like fire, looking as if they were preparing to spring.

"The bonny children," muttered the old crone, "they were upon her, and they would have spoiled her pretty face. Up! out!"

The last words she spoke to her pets, and in an instant they stood at Jabez's feet.

"What do you keep those creatures for?" said Easterbrook.

"Why do your gentlefolk keep their dogs? To guard them, don't they? Could they get guards better than those?

When I speak, they obey. One word from me, and, like the two devils they are, they would pull your black eyes out of your head. Have I to pay this wondrously free country for a licence for my cats? No. If I keep a dog, I, a poor gipsy, would have to help to maintain some fat, lazy gormandiser by paying for a licence. Have I answered you? No. They frightened the maiden, bold as she is, but they obeyed me, and she is now, without a scratch, changing her attire in the adjoining room. They would keep me safe, but I have not my pets for that. There is something more in life than caring for the body. Man, those are spirits. They help me to commune with spirits. Through them, I can read the fortunes, the destiny of men, I can peer into the unalterable past, and see on the grass above men's graves the history of their lives. Through them I can command the buried dead, make them obey my summons, and tell me things which only the chosen few may know, concerning the great and awful time coming. Do you wonder why I keep them now? Do you know the dearest thing in life? It is power, power, power. They give it me. They are my beloved ones."

Meanwhile the two strange animals walked around the young minister steadily, and regularly, as though they were sentinels on guard.

"You have tamed them well, at any rate," said Jabez, with a smile.

"You do not believe in me," she snarled. "I saw that when we met first; but tell me, did I not tell you true?"

"I really cannot say, I have forgotten all about it."

"Forgotten? Young man, weigh well the words of those who, according to the decrees of fate, know the past and the future. I tell you I have power. I can undo, I can alter destiny."

"Blaspheme not, mother, neither touch with unclean hands that which is sacred."

"Blaspheme! Dost thou know what blasphemy is? Blasphemy lies not in the word, but in life. The blasphemer is he or she who neglects or abuses the gifts of life. It does not lie in paltry words. Listen, the night is dark, I cannot see the stars which tell me the meaning of that which to the base soul is meaningless, or unknown, and so these children of the unseen land have been given me; they unfold, they teach."

"Teach what?"

"Wisdom."

"I should like to hear it."

"Through them I can raise the spirits of the dead."

"I should like to see them."

The wind blew around the caravan, and caused a mournful, wailing sound; it seemed to speak and tell some sad tale.

"They are all around us now, young man. They speak in the wind, they move among the rain-drops."

"Words, mother, words."

"Ah, would you see? Are you brave enough?"

"I would see all the spirits you can raise."

"Would you see the devil?"

"Come, I am not a child. I too often see the devil in the evil passions of my race, in the meanness and fraud which is all around me. I meet him with a thousand forms in actual life. Do not think to frighten me with meaningless jargon about ghosts and bogies, intended to frighten silly boys and girls who come to have their fortunes told."

As he spoke a strange smell like sulphur filled the room, the air became clouded, and the candle which had lit up the apartment in the caravan burned blue. He heard strange hissing noises, and the eyes of the cats became like living ball, of fire.

"The spirits are nearing," hissed the old dame; "dost thou believe now? Wilt own my power now?"

"Bah!" said Jabez. "You know your art well. Open

the door and let the fresh air come in. You have evidently dabbled a bit in chemistry, and you know how to poison the air. You know how to make noises. I have no doubt but that you will try and cause an optical illusion next, and I shall be supposed to fancy I have seen the devil. I believe in God, woman, and am not frightened by child's play."

"Don't you believe now?" she whispered.

"Look here, I do not know your purpose in trying these tricks on me, but let me tell you they are a failure. There, let us have something pure to breathe. I am more interested in the lady's welfare than in spirits. Where is Miss Ashton?"

Margaret here entered the room in garments that made her look like a gipsy queen, accompanied by a dark, evil-looking woman, who looked maliciously on Jabez, and then watched the old woman, as though she were afraid of her.

"There is your answer, young man. Think you that ought is wrong with us? Follow me, and you will find food."

With this she crawled away towards the tent they had first entered, where they found some savoury food, well-cooked, and which caused a delightful odour, at least it seemed so to Jabez, who was by this time almost famishing with hunger. Their supper was served up roughly, but the wooden platters were clean, and everything was wholesome. For some time they ate in silence, and then the old woman spoke again.

"You are both wondering about me," she said.

Both Jabez and Margaret were silent. The old woman looked at them keenly, and then motioned to the man and woman who were in the tent to retire, and in a minute more the three were alone.

"Am I a puzzle to you?" she asked, after some time.

Both of them nodded.

"Do you wonder at the life I lead?"

"I do, indeed," replied Jabez.

"Listen," she said; "I sent out Lorenzo, and his wife,

to tell you what I would not like them to hear. You, young man, have disappointed me, more than words can say."

"I have! how?" asked Jabez.

"Do you know the dearest thing in life. Yes. I told you a little while ago. It is power, *power*, POWER! Look at me. I am old, shrivelled, ugly. Strong men quail when I look at them, timid youths and maidens tremble when they look on me. I am hideous, repellent; I know it, and I glory in it."

"Glory in being repellent?"

"Yes; do you know why? It tells me of that power. It tells me I have it. Ah! I like to see your eyelids quiver and lips tremble. I like to make people's flesh creep, and their blood run cold. It tells me of my power."

"Power is a curse unless used for the benefit of mankind."

"Talk, mere idle, empty talk. Power is sweet, sweet as the morning dew, and glorious as the hills in the early sunrise. Why am I talking thus? Because you have disappointed—enraged me—ugh! Look at me.

"Was I always as I am now? Did I when a child tramp around the country, the companion of gipsies? No! I was as well-bred and as carefully nursed as you. My father was an Italian, my mother an English lady. She only lived a few years after I was born, and her death almost broke my father's heart, and, then, as if to add bitterness to his sorrow, some dispute arose about the property which came to my father through my mother. It ended in the property being thrown into Chancery, and in destroying my father's life, and I was left alone. Your English law has done wonders in doing justice to the child of an alien, as you may imagine, when I tell you that not only have I been entirely deprived of my rights, but my endeavours to get my own swallowed up the fortune I re-

ceived from my father; consequently at the age of eighteen I was homeless and friendless.

"What could I do? Be a governess? I knew what that meant well enough. Educate dull and petty children, be blamed for their ill manners, yet not be allowed to correct them; be blamed for their lack of progress, and not allowed to insist on proper application to work. My spirit could not stand being nominally an equal with puffed-up tradesmen, but really a despised drudge, and that was all I was fit for. My grandmother used to sing the old Italian songs among our sunny hills from which she could see the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, and she went from village to village singing, and thinking it no shame to obtain a livelihood in that way, I did the same. That was how I began. You see what I am."

"A strange story," said Jabez. "But you said I had disappointed you. I would like to know why."

"Disappointed me. Yes. I said the dearest thing in life was power. It is. I have been striving for years to increase mine. I have been able to make boys and women believe in me, and in my art, but I wanted to convince a man, a strong-minded, educated man, that I had intercourse with the spiritual world. I tried to-night, and I failed—bah, failed."

"You have failed, because your whole business is a tissue of falsehoods, because it appeals to nothing true within us."

"Tissue of falsehoods! Appeals to nothing true! But I tell you it is not falsehood. I do know. I have seen. I can read the fortunes of men. I do know the mysteries of life and death. You do not believe in me, but it is true. Let me tell you, young man, that before two years are over, your life will be changed, your profession changed. Old associations will be broken up, and relationships destroyed, which are now as dear to you as your evesight."

She spoke passionately; her dark eyes burned with the intensity of her words. The woman evidently believed what she said to be true. If she spoke false, she believed in the false.

Margaret became interested. This strange character fascinated her.

"And what of me, mother?" she said.

The gipsy looked at her imperiously. "I will not tell you," she said. "You would be ready to strike me dead if I did; but remember the words I spoke to you among the Yorkshire hills."

"I've almost forgotten them."

"Then further words will be wasted on you. The gipsy has given you dry garments. She has given you food. She will give you bed. Follow me."

The three went out into the night. The storm had gone, the moon sailed in a cloudless sky. The stars shone with unusual brilliancy, and a great calm had settled on the solemn mountains. Margaret felt awed by the scene. A few hours before she was battling with a terrific storm, and only angry fiends seemed to exist around her. But now, everything spoke of some great power behind the storm. A power that was infinite. The calm taught her its lessons more plainly because she had recently battled with the storm, and yet God was not hers—if there were a God. What could the Creator of this vast universe care for her? The cold, blue stars seemed to mock the first true touch of faith, and told her that if God were real He could be nothing to her. Christianity seemed to her only an imperfect system at best, perhaps only a beautiful superstition.

The gipsy seemed to divine her feelings.

"Look up, and up," she said. "Think still, think more, and then try and fathom the decrees of destiny. I will see if your bed is ready, and call you when it is."

The two were left alone again, but either spoke to the

other. Both looked upward and were awed by the glories of the works of God. The gipsy, evidently thinking they wanted to be alone, did not call Margaret to rest.

Presently Jabez spoke.

"Of what are you thinking, Miss Ashton?"

"I scarcely know. I have only one clear thought just now, and that has seemingly little to do with the indefinite workings of my mind, which is in a state of bewilderment."

"And what is the thought?"

"That people can themselves be sure of what is wholly and essentially false."

"Would you mind explaining?"

"Think of that gipsy. She is certain she can read the future, commune with spirits, and a lot of other things which cannot possibly be. Mr. Easterbrook, may not education, hereditary influence, desires, and the like, make one certain, conscious, if you like, of what cannot be?"

"It might, I think. But it must be under extraordinary circumstances. Why do you ask?"

"Because, in spite of myself, you have made me think about Christianity. Your faith in it is so strong. It is such a power in your life, you evidently are sure about it. That gipsy is sure about her tricks, just as you are about your religion. May not your belief be false even as hers is false? She is longing to make others believe in her trade because she longs for power. You long to make men believe in Christ because something within you urges you to do so. Which something may be the result of the same laws, as her love for power is. Excuse me, Mr. Easterbrook, but even Christianity, which certainly as far as I have read is the highest and truest of all religions, seems only a relative thing. It is a system, and a system cannot contain all the truth. Your Christ was a glorious man, but He's dead to me, and as for believing Him to be God, I cannot. I wish I could believe His Divinity, His resurrection and immortality."

"Whence that wish, Miss Ashton?"

"Most likely from some bit of Puritan blood in my veins, an inheritance from my grandfathers."

"Your objection about the gipsy may be valid if only one part of the being were cultivated and developed. If I cared for nothing but feeling and emotion, then my belief in religion might not be worth much. We do not pay much attention to the mathematician's opinion of Milton's 'Paradise Lost,' when he thought little of it because it proved nothing. Still the opinion of a well-balanced mind and nature must or should weigh for something."

"Do you think your mind and nature well balanced?"

"Perhaps not, but I have not been making it lopsided during the last year."

"And is religion true to you?"

"As that two and two make four."

"And is God real?"

"As the beauty of a lily, or the fragrance of a violet."

"But tell me, can you understand how Christ can be God?"

"No, I cannot understand it. But I know that the truer I am, and the purer, the more is Christ God to me."

"But, Mr. Easterbrook, Christ is not in the starry heavens; nothing above tells me about Him. He was a true, brave, struggling man, that I believe, but a Saviour, a God, that is where I am compelled to stumble."

"Miss Ashton, if you wish to find, you must seek. I can do nothing for you. No one can do anything for you, but the great God Himself. If there is a God He is worth finding, you must feel that. Without God all is chaos. With God all difficulties are explained. Don't say because God is not real to you, or that Christ is not real, that they do not exist, and that they are not real to others. Find God, and all will be new to you."

"But how can I find Him?"

"Read your Bible; your New Testament especially. Read the life of Christ by the Apostle who knew and loved Him best. Let your science and philosophy come to your aid. Carry scientific discoveries and philosophical axioms to their logical issue, fairly and truly, without troubling as to what those issues may be. Pray, to what to you as yet is only a vague idea, an indefinite something, and if that something exists, truly, it will become real. You are in God's hands. He loves you more than you can love yourself. Do not be afraid, if you search for God you do not go alone. If you are willing to be led, you will land right, somewhere, sometime, only be true, be earnest, and all must be well, for God lives."

Margaret looked at him in astonishment. Was this the gawky youth who a year ago seemed afraid to think, and who talked as a child who scarcely understood the elements of true thinking?

She left him without a word, however, except a simple "good-night," for she heard the gipsy's voice calling her to rest.

Jabez entered the tent in which they had supped, where he found Lorenzo, who asked him the particulars of their adventure, and then showed him a heap of clothing which had been prepared for his bed, after which the young minister was left alone.

Next morning early he was aroused by the sound of familiar voices outside the tent. He got up, and found his clothes, dried and cleaned, by his side, and having quickly dressed, he stepped outside and found Mr. Ashton and Reginald, who, overjoyed at the news of their safety, had hurried to them. It appeared that Lorenzo had, at the instigation of his mother, gone to the cottage in which Jabez had left the party at daybreak, but was informed on his arrival there that they had left for Grasmere as soon as the storm had cleared, and were in all probability staying at

one of the hotels for the night. Lorenzo accordingly went to the "Prince of Wales Hotel" in Grasmere, where he found Mr. Ashton, Reginald, and two or three men, who knew the mountains well, just starting to search for the lost ones A sleepless night had been spent by all the family, and the joy of Lorenzo's news can be better imagined than expressed. Mr. Ashton and Reginald accompanied the gipsy as we have seen, and found both Margaret and Jabez safe and well.

The gipsy pressed food on them all, and presided over the breakfast arrangements with a dignity which surprised Mr. Ashton and Reginald, who expected to find only a vulgar, ignorant gang of people. For some time, too, the old dame stoutly refused Mr. Ashton's offer of remuneration, but at length unwillingly consented for Lorenzo to receive some reward, who smiled grimly as he pocketed several golden coins.

Before they left the camp the old gipsy called Jabez and Margaret aside, and looking up into their faces said,

"I think we shall meet again. Destiny seems to point to it, and if it does, we must obey. None of us live alone, our lives are interwoven, welded into each other. There are links binding the lives of men together, and when those links break true life is gone. Young man, you must be brave, for difficulties are before you; young woman, remember you have something besides a mind. Farewell, till we meet again."

"Strange character," thought Jabez as he walked away. "A keen observer, and a close thinker evidently. Does she believe in her art, I wonder? Belief is a strange thing, and our strongest beliefs sometimes flit away like cloud shadows. She's a good character reader though, and, like Disraeli, has a wonderful power of calculating as to the future. I wonder now if my future is——"

But here Reginald engaged him in conversation, which was maintained until they joined the rest of the party at Grasmere, where Jabez had little opportunity of speculating on the future.

CHAPTER XXII.

"BROTHER" BOWMAN.

YORKSHIRE again. The Cumberland and Westmoreland hills are left behind. Huge coal heaps take the place of glorious mountains, dirty mill ponds of clear and beautiful lakes. Several months have passed away since the incidents mentioned in our last chapter.

It is the month of April, but the winter cannot be said to be gone; the wind blows very chilly, and showers of sleet and snow often sweep across the dreary hills. The winter has been a hard and long one, and now, when the birds should be singing and the flowers appearing, it still reigns supreme.

Jabez Easterbrook sits in his arm-chair, evidently deep in thought. A letter is in his hand which he has read over and over again as if in wonder. Let us look over his shoulder, and take the liberty of reading it too, and then we shall understand why he is so perplexed. It runs as follows:

"MY DEAR SIR,—I have received news from an authority which is unimpeachable, that your preaching and general teaching in the churches in which you have been appointed to labour are not according to the belief you professed when examined before the Committee of Examination nearly two years ago. Indeed, so much is your theology at variance with that generally held and taught in our churches, that

after having thought carefully over the matter, I feel it my duty to request you to attend at —— on Tuesday, May 3rd, when your case will be considered by the committee elected for that purpose. I may say that the doctrines in which you are considered unsound are the Inspiration of the Scriptures, the Theory of the Atonement, and the Doctrine of Retribution. I may say that with regard to the latter doctrine, you are not accused of making any positive statement, but that the logical issue of your teaching on the Fatherhood of God leads to a conclusion diametrically opposed to what is taught in Methodist theology.

"I thought it right to mention these matters, so that you might not come unprepared to defend yourself, should you feel disposed to do so.—I am, dear sir, yours truly,

"ARCHIBALD MCLELLAN."

This letter, as I have said, Jabez read over time after time with a look of wonder on his face. It had burst upon him suddenly, and he was altogether unprepared for it. The questions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy had not troubled him for many a long month. Ever since the night in which Margaret had so staggered his faith by her sceptical assertions, he had been working, and thinking, and praying, in order to get at the truth. Sometimes he had struggled almost in darkness, having only one certain belief, viz., in the existence of a great loving God. He had studied the Bible carefully and reverently, and had brought every help that was in his reach to aid him in his work. He had read it in the light of history and in the light of contemporary teaching. He had read it through and through, and had prayed that he might be able to get at the truth which God intended to teach. Through difficulty and sorrow he had plodded on, feeling that he had been led through all nearer the mind and heart of God. Especially had he felt himself drawn into closer fellowship with Him during the winter.

Owing to a great depression in trade, two or three of the important mills in the neighbourhood had stopped running, which had caused a vast amount of poverty. And then in addition to this there had been a great deal of sickness in the village, and, as a consequence, Jabez had had his time fully occupied in visiting the sick and the dying. Those visits had revealed more and more to him of the Father's love and care, had drawn him farther and farther away from the loveless creeds which had crippled his life in years gone by. But he had never troubled about so-called "modern thought." He had simply tried to teach what he believed God had led him to teach, never dreaming that it would be regarded as heterodoxy. The letter seemed so poor to him, so opposed to the spirit of Christ's teaching and of growing life. It implied that the truth on these subjects was found and settled, and now all he had to do was to accept it without question. He cast his mind over the time he had been in Heathertown, and he remembered that when he first came he would have fully agreed with the spirit and tone of the letter, but now, it struck him as unworthy of a child of God. He had not accepted his present beliefs because of any particular whim or fancy, or because it might please those whom he loved to call friends. He believed in what he did because his beliefs were forced upon him by the forces which were at work, around, and in him. The necessities of his life led him to modify some of his views, but he never departed from what he believed Christ had taught, and what He was teaching him day by day.

He thought of the three points of doctrine in which he was considered unsound, and he could not remember ever saying one word on any of them which could be considered unsound; indeed he had never said anything specifically about them. He had simply tried to teach life truths, and had not troubled about teaching any theory of inspiration or atonement. Thus it was that the letter perplexed him

He did not trouble as to who the "unimpeachable authority" was, he knew that there were a few heresy hunters who would be glad enough to pick holes in his doctrines, and thus cause him much worry and pain, but he did trouble that the faith for which he had fought a long and terrible battle should be regarded as a departure from the truth.

He had come back from the Lake District with but one idea, and that was to be faithful to the leadings of God. He had given up all idea of ever winning Margaret Ashton as his wife, or he fancied he had, while the thought of winning Miss Verner he had put aside almost at the moment he had conceived it. She was pure and beautiful, but she was not for him; first, because much as he admired her he did not love her, neither did she care for him, save as a dear friend. This had been revealed to him in a thousand ways during the latter part of their stay at Windermere, and he was pleased to see that Reginald Ashton delighted to be in her company, while she evidently was not averse to his. It is true he had been much with Margaret during the last few days of their stay, because Warren had left for home the day after the storm, on what he told them was important business; and Miss Brooklyn, when she saw that Reginald did not enjoy her company as much as in days gone by, suddenly remembered a long-forgotten promise to visit some other friends. Still neither had broken a kind of icy reserve that characterised their actions and words. Even religion was scarcely mentioned, and so they spoke together of books which contained matter of mutual interest to them, together with mere commonplace matters of everyday life.

Jabez thought of his determination as he sat alone with the letter in his hand this chilly April evening, and he was thankful to say that he had tried to be true. He had worked as few men work. Early and late, he had either been at his studies, doing church work, visiting the sick, or collecting money to help the poor and needy. He had tried to be

true. He had preached what was true to his own soul, his best self had confirmed what he had said. He had seen little or nothing of Margaret. He had prayed that she might be led to the light, and although she gave but few indications of having accepted the faith of Christ, he still felt sure that God was leading her into the light.

Presently he heard a knock at the door, and opening it he found the superintendent minister of the circuit.

"Good-evening, Brother Easterbrook," said the old man.

"Good-evening, Mr. Bowman," said Jabez. Mr. Bowman had only been in the circuit since the previous August, during which time Jabez had seen very little of him. He was a tall, bilious-looking man, with smirky-looking eyes, and a continuous smile upon his face. He had not preached a new sermon for twenty-five years. Before that time he had been regarded as a popular preacher, but he had found that constantly making new sermons meant much work, and so, as he had made enough during the early years of his ministry to last his ordinary ministerial stay in a circuit, he traded upon his old stock, preaching the same discourses at every place he went, until his manuscripts were yellow with age and use. As a consequence of this his mind had not grown, neither had he any idea of the thought and feeling of the day. He never saw the inside of a good review, and denounced all scientific discoveries, and all modern research, as worthy only of the sons of Belial, who would soon be thrown into the pit of Tophet.

Since he had been in the circuit, he had found that Easterbrook's popularity was very great, and he also found that his worn-out platitudes were received with but little favour by the sturdy, common-sense Yorkshire people. He had told his best and most pathetic stories, but he could not cause a tear to start to the eye. He trotted out all the death-bed scenes he could think of or invent, without any effect, save a look of incredulity or a contemptuous smile

which crossed the faces of the younger portion of his congregation. He preached the commercial aspect of the atonement with tremendous vigour. He told the people how God had paid through the sufferings of Christ the debt of sin, but did not say to whom He had paid it. He told them all they had to do was just to believe the debt was paid, and then they were saved, and that those who did not believe would be damned. He preached imputed righteousness with great unction, and held fast to the letter of truth without grasping the great eternal principles of righteousness which are necessary to every true life. As a consequence of this, even those who had not agreed with Jabez preferred his fresh, vigorous utterances to the cut-and-dried statements of the older divine.

Mr. Bowman professed to be a true Methodist, and would turn aside for no new phase of thought or action. He called every man and woman "brother" and "sister;" even his wife did not escape the usual appellation. When speaking of her, or to her, in a church meeting, he would say, "I think, Sister Bowman would say," or "What do you think, Sister Bowman?" while she, being so versed in his ways, always took care to call him "brother." As a consequence of this, they were called "Brother" and "Sister Bowman" by the villagers, which caused many a laugh among the young people.

Brother Bowman, on entering Easterbrook's lodgings, took off his greasy hat and placed it on the table, then pulled off his black, shabby gloves, and, after having blown into them, placed them by the side of the hat. This being done, he untied a blue silk neckerchief, and seeing that Jabez's arm-chair was unoccupied, calmly sat himself down in it, as though he had a special right to it, being the superintendent minister. But a would-be sanctimonious smile wreathed his face, and he heaved a sigh of dismal impressiveness when he sat down, so no doubt the chair received a kind of virtue through contact with him.

Jabez had never liked him, however. There was nothing outspoken or manly about him, and although they had never any real differences, it was because the younger man did not in any way encourage a mutual expression of opinion.

After smoothing his face with his thin, bony, right hand, and turning the yellow of his eyes to the ceiling several times, he arose from the chair and began to look at the books that were arranged along the shelves.

"Maurice, Kingsley, Channing, Theodore Parker, Frederick Robertson, Stopford Brooke," he said. "Ah, I have heard of them; very unsafe books for a young man. Very unsafe. Hem! 'Reign of Law,' by the Duke of Argyll. Ah! it's not law we want, but grace, Brother Easterbrook. I suppose it's on the law of Moses, but better get Matthew Henry on St. Paul's Epistles. Comte! I never heard of him. 'Montaigne's Essays.' Who is that man? 'Life of Jesus,' by Ernest Renan; I'm glad you've got that. It is a sound book. Von Hartmann, Schopenhauer; what in the world do they write about, Brother Easterbrook, and who are they?"

"They are German writers, and teach a theory which goes by the name of Pessimism."

"Ah. Not good for a young man. These Germans appeal to the head too much, and not enough to the heart. They believe in scholarship, and don't stick to the old-fashioned way of explaining the Scriptures."

Easterbrook did not reply, but stood quietly watching while this would-be judge of books went on reading the titles of volumes, and commenting on them.

"George MacDonald. You have several of his, I see; what are the subjects on which he writes?"

"They are mostly novels."

"Novels! Brother Easterbrook, you have precious and immortal souls to save, and that will allow you no time to read novels."

"I don't save souls, sir. Only God can do that."

The older man turned upon him with a withering look, and then resumed his critical examination of the books, most of which he had never seen or heard of before.

"George Eliot. Ah, and what did he write?"

"You can see the names of her books if you look again."

"Her! Oh, I remember now. A bad woman who has written a lot of novels. Ah, a bad sign. Hem! Carlyle, Emerson, Matthew Arnold, Reuss, Strauss, Goethe. Young man, I'll read no further." He sat down in the arm-chair again, and did not speak for several minutes. Then he turned around to Easterbrook, and said, "Let us pray."

Jabez knelt down rather unwillingly, and while his superintendent minister was telling the Lord some very wonderful things, he could not help feeling what a hollow farce it was. The spirit of prayer was not evidently felt, and so they arose from their knees unbenefited.

"Brother Easterbrook," said Mr. Bowman, after some little pause, "I must say I am not pleased with your library."

"I am sorry for that; but might I ask whether you have read the books?"

"Never, I am glad to say. No, it's the style of books I do not like. Your authors are not the old safe writers, Where are your *Watson's Institutes?* Where are Wesley's works? Where is your *Life of William Bramwell?* Where is Baxter's *Saints' Rest?* Where is your Adam Clarke and your Matthew Henry?"

"I have read most of them and have sold them to buy others."

"Brother Easterbrook, it is no wonder you hold such notions as you do while you read the books you do."

"Might I ask what you know of my notions?"

"Well, I think I have had a fair chance. I have stood in the porch while you have preached at Moortown for three

Tuesday nights. I have been doubtful about your views, and so I thought I would find out for myself."

"It would have been more gracious of you to have come in and sat down with the rest of the congregation."

"No, young man. Perhaps if you had known your superintendent was there, you wouldn't have dared to say the things you did."

"I think I should."

"Ah! You are a very bold young man. But I have found out the secret of your popularity. You have given the people itching ears by departing from the old landmarks, and, like the Athenians, they are running after some new thing."

"Well, I am sorry that you do not think my preaching right; but might I ask whether it is to the unsoundness of my preaching that I owe the honour of this visit?"

"Partly, partly, Brother Easterbrook," said the preacher, blandly. "If youth and inexperience will listen to age and experience, you might be won from the error of your ways."

"Would you mind pointing out wherein my ways are in error?" said Easterbrook a little indignantly.

"Well, I should say the error of your thoughts, and belief, and teaching."

"Point out my error there, please."

"I could not do it in so many words, but I find that you teach differently from what I teach; you do not walk in your superintendent's paths."

"Well, what then?"

"What then! Need you ask, Brother Easterbrook?"

"I think so. I have yet to learn that you are infallible, or that you have found all the truth."

"Brother Easterbrook, I was received into 'Full Connexion' thirty-five years ago. I answered creditably and faithfully the questions asked me, and I was regarded sound in the faith."

"What faith?"

"Why, the Methodist faith. The doctrines taught by John Wesley."

"Well, do I contradict his teachings?"

"Not in so many words; but in effect you do. You draw your congregations by your new-fangled notions, while those who preach the old Gospel have to preach to almost empty seats."

"Is that the fault of the preacher or the message?"

"It is the fault of those who have been feeding the people on husks, until they have no desire for the kernel."

"Strange freak of nature that."

"Brother Easterbrook, I have called at John Scott's house to-night, and when I unfolded to him the plan of salvation, although he is on his deathbed, he would not listen to me."

"Indeed, why?"

"Because you had been there and had poisoned his mind and endangered his soul."

"How?"

"Why, instead of pointing out to him the plan of salvation, you told him that God would do the best thing for him."

"Well, won't He?"

"Brother Easterbrook, I have found you out. I called to-night thinking to help you out of a difficulty, but now you must take your chance with the committee."

"Oh, I see. You have taken it upon you to inform the secretary of my supposed unsoundness."

"I have, Brother Easterbrook."

"Don't call me 'brother,' until you can act brotherly. This whole business is unmanly and unchristian. But I can take my chance, I can speak the truth honestly."

"We shall soon see whether your popularity will last when the people know you have been preaching heterodoxy."

"What a pity they could not find it out without telling.

Mr. Bowman, allow me to inform you that I pay rent for this room, and that I choose to be alone."

"What? You speak so to your superintendent minister! Is this the result of your unbelief?"

The whole conduct of the man had been so mean that Jabez could restrain himself no longer.

"Mr. Bowman," he said, "I did not seek this interview, for we have little in common. But seeing so much has been said, I will speak my mind. You complain of empty seats. Do you try and enter into the life of the people? Do you try and supply their wants and help them in their difficulties? Have you read the books which these young men who will not come and hear you, read? Have you tried to make yourself acquainted with the mental life of to-day? If you have not, do not come and find fault with those who have. You accuse me of heterodoxy because I do not believe as you do. Have you found all the truth, or has God ceased to reveal Himself since the man from whom you got your theology, died? You accuse me of reading unsound books. How do you know they are unsound? You have never read them; you know nothing of the grand faith of some of these men. You give an assent to a conventional faith, and rest upon authority for all you believe. Do you know that I have fought for my faith? Fought sometimes in agony, and now because I cannot believe as you do, and because the people receive my teachings gladly, you persecute me, you seek to undermine my influence, you seek to make my life miserable. Sir, I will no longer hold intercourse with you as a man and a brother; good-night." And the young minister held the door in his hand while he handed the older one his greasy hat and gloves.

"There," said Jabez to himself when he was gone, "I've been foolish and impatient, I know, but I could restrain myself no longer, and I am not sorry for what I have done;" and then he sat down again and thought over the events of the evening, and wondered what the result would be.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHARGE OF HERESY.

Two days after the events mentioned in the last chapter every one in the neighbourhood knew of the letter which Jabez had received. Brother Bowman had shown his brotherliness by publishing the news, that "Brother" Easterbrook—he was particularly careful to mention the "Brother"—was accused of heresy which almost amounted to infidelity. That the teaching of Bradburn, the great infidel, exactly agreed with that of the young preacher. This was a splendid piece of gossip for those in the village that loved it, and especially for those who had not agreed with his teaching.

Mr. Graysteel, one of the members of the church, said that they must all feel greatly indebted to Mr. Bowman for finding out the poison, and telling them about it. He had had a suspicion of it for a long time, for he—Easterbrook—had been always telling them to live right and be like Jesus Christ, instead of telling them about the merits of the blood of Jesus. "Indeed," said Mr. Graysteel warmly, "he has never preached a word what we believe, but what he believes himself, and it is a great mercy that he's found out."

Others whose crooked actions Jabez had denounced and declared to be of the devil, likewise rejoiced, and said that they preferred true preaching to a full chapel, and they hoped that soon they would have a little about imputed

righteousness, and the blood of Jesus, and not so much of works, which were at best only filthy rags.

But on the whole the people grieved greatly, and most of the congregation waxed warm against the man who had played such a scurvy trick, and declared that they would stand by their friend through thick and thin. None, however, came to see him; those who opposed him were secretly glad, and thus did not call; while those who were his friends thought that he would rather be alone, and that it would be misplaced attention to call upon him. And so the time passed until the third of May came, and Jabez, with anxious heart, found his way to the city to which he had been summoned. He had not prepared a defence, for he had received no definite accusation, but he determined to answer in a straightforward way any fair question, not cloaking anything. On finding the chapel where the committee had decided to meet, he saw his superintendent talking earnestly to Mr. McLellan, the man who had written the letter. They both cast a furtive glance at him as he came up. He was shown into a vestry, and told that he would be called when the committee were ready to consider the case.

It is a hard thing to wait, especially alone, for anything you are anxiously looking for, and as the minutes passed by, without any communication from the committee-room, and not knowing what they might be doing, he felt sick at heart, while his nerves began to feel the strain upon them severely.

At length, however, the secretary came to the vestry, and told him to follow him to the lecture hall, and then led the way along a dark corridor, which presently opened into a large room, in which sat some twenty or thirty men. Every eye was turned upon him as he came in, each member mentally took notes of him, and each according to his bent of thought began to pass judgment upon him.

Although many were very bitter about anything that

savoured of heterodoxy, not one of them could help admiring his manly appearance. He had lost the awkwardness which characterised him when he first came to Heathertown, while the angularity of his form was also gone. Moreover, his clothes fitted him well, and, as he stood before the committee, tall and stalwart, perfectly upright, yet without the slightest affectation of defiance, his eyes burning with a clear, steady lustre, while his coal-black hair was thrown carelessly back over a noble forehead, every member of the committee felt that here was not a man to be trifled with, or to be lightly discarded. A man who would be a credit to any Church or organisation; a man whom they must not lose from the denomination if it were possible to keep him

"Brother Easterbrook, will you be seated?" said the president of the meeting.

"Thank you, sir, I prefer to stand," was the reply.

The president looked keenly at him, but seeing that he declined the seat out of no disrespect to the committee, gave him a smile of encouragement. He was a keen-looking man, with a somewhat merry twinkle of the eye. Evidently, if there was a humorous side to the question, the president would be inclined to see it.

"Brother Easterbrook, you are accused of unsound teaching," he said. "Do you admit the truth of the accusation?" He evidently asked this question as a kind of feeler, to test, if possible, the man before them.

"Before I answer that," replied Jabez, "I should like to hear the particulars of the accusation."

The chairman smiled. "Will you kindly read the particulars of this case, Mr. Secretary," he said.

Mr. McLellan rose, with a lot of manuscript in his hands, and looked vastly important.

"The charges are three," he said pompously, "with which this young man is accused. First, he is accused of being unsound on the Inspiration of the Scriptures. In proof of

this accusation, I have it, on the authority of a gentleman in this room, that he has distinctly stated in a sermon that the central teaching of the Book of Ecclesiastes is false, and that it has a bad moral tendency. That it is not true to life, and that Solomon was not inspired when he wrote it." He then went on to say that it was the teaching of Wesley, that every word in the Bible was written at the prompting of God's spirit, and if Mr. Easterbrook's teaching were true, the whole theory of Inspiration would be destroyed.

The second charge was that Mr. Easterbrook did not believe in the Atonement. That the death of Christ was not to take away the result of sin. Indeed, that any theory of the Atonement was at best insufficient, and that the world wanted more than that. This also was enlarged upon at a great length, and was made to look very dark indeed for the accused.

The third charge was that Mr. Easterbrook has said that God would never do anything for any man that was not for that man's good. That if a man learnt to know God, he would believe that hell was an expression of His love, and would be for the good of man. That God would never do anything without a moral purpose, and any teaching that was opposed to such a truth could not be from above, but from below.

In connection with this there were also many conclusions drawn, many extracts from his sermons read, and compared with the teachings of sound theologians.

When the charges were all read there was silence in the room for a few seconds, silence that was almost painful.

"Well, Mr. Easterbrook," said the president, "what have you to say against these charges?"

"If it please you, sir," replied Jabez, "I wish that the persons from whom these accusations originally came would speak. These are so far anonymous charges, which I do not care to answer."

Then Brother Bowman arose, with great dignity and pride. It was not often that he was thus brought into contact with the dignitaries of the denomination, and he felt the honour. He determined, too, to be worthy of the honour, and so he adjusted his white necktie, put on his parsonic air, placed the point of each finger on the one hand, against the point of the corresponding finger on the other hand, let them drop before him, and then began to speak.

"Mr. President," he said, looking benignly upon him, "and fellow workers," first letting his smirky eye rest upon the members of the committee, and then showing their yellows by pretending to look to the ceiling—which was his location of Heaven—for guidance and grace, "as you may imagine, this is one of the most painful duties of my life, but it is a duty, and thus, however heart-rending—and it is heart-rending—it may be for me to accuse a fellow minister of departing from the faith once for all delivered to the saints, I will do it."

This, although a good beginning from his point of view, was scarcely true. He had enjoyed nothing so much for many a long day; for the pleasure of meeting and dining with so many clerical dignitaries was worth coming for, and as for the real purpose of his presence, he delighted in it.

"When I entered the ministry," he continued, "I promised to be true to our beloved faith, and I meant what I promised,"—here he looked sternly at two or three ministers, who had told him in plain words their opinion of his mission "I determined that I would hold fast by the old Gospel, and boldly defy all who comes, who should in any way oppose the teachings of the Father of the Methodist Churches, the wide world over, of whatever family of Methodists they might belong to. Well, brethren, I went to Moortown with that determination. I had been grieved to hear that many of our younger men, sir. had not been thus true, had not

been loyal to the doctrines contained in our Connexional deeds, and which can't be—I repeat it, brethren—can't be improved upon. And why can't they be improved upon? Because, brethren, there is a proof passage taken from God's Book for every doctrine we teach, and that, I say, is final."

Jabez took a seat here, this affair promised to be longer than he anticipated, and he wanted to conserve his strength.

"When I came to my circuit"—here he took a sip of water, and placed his hands in their previous position—"what did I find? Well, I won't deny I found that Brother Easterbrook was very popular. Brethren, those who know me, will know that I rejoiced at this"—here several smiled incredulously—"but when I found the secret of his popularity, then my rejoicing ceased. I found that my message of the old Gospel was lightly thought of, and few came to hear it, while the people who had itching ears came to hear my colleague in crowds. I inquired what he preached, and I was told 'Jesus Christ,' but after a slight unimportant talk with him, for he never made a confidant of me, I found that I must be on the watch. Being ever jealous for the truth, and knowing how young men are apt to depart from its glorious paths, I determined to listen to some of his sermons. I could not do this on a Sunday, so I arranged to do it on the week nights, and, gentlemen, to my unutterable sorrow, I found out that our young brother's views were *altogether* at variance with those of his superintendent."

Here he re-stated the accusations named by the secretary, giving in many cases bare statements which Jabez had made without reference to the facts which called for them, and by a certain amount of manipulation of words he made out that Easterbrook denied the Bible, denied the Atonement, and denied the existence of hell. After having done this he continued as follows:—

"Gentlemen, I am here in the interest of truth, I am labouring in my circuit in the interest of truth, consequently,

after having heard these heretical discourses, I carefully inquired as to his general teaching, and I found that many of his sermons were far worse than those I have told you about. I found that in his visiting he left out the old soul-saving truths, especially in his talks to the sick and the dying. Besides this, I found that he was the intimate friend of the curate of the village in which he lives. This curate, gentlemen, is nothing more nor less than a Unitarian, a man who revels in the teaching of German writers, and who is at the head of a literary society, in which he allows free discussion on such subjects as the Divinity of Christ, the truth of the Bible, &c., which can only do harm. I repeat, gentlemen, that Brother Easterbrook is an *intimate* friend of this man, and I am told, on good authority, that the two together read, not soul-saving books, like the 'Life of William Bramwell,' but books by Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, and Harrison. Then, gentlemen, some days ago, I visited Brother Easterbrook at his lodgings. He did not receive me kindly, much less in the way that a young man in a circuit is supposed to meet his superintendent; but I did have a chance to see his books. Gentlemen, I solemnly declare that I did not see one book on Methodist theology, or even by a Methodist writer. I pointed this out to him. Did he not feel ashamed? Not he. He seemed to regard me as one who knew nothing about books, and as good as told me so, and then when I, as in duty bound, being an older man and his superintendent, remonstrated with him, he actually opened the door, and told me he desired to be alone.

"Now, gentlemen—brethren—do not think I have any personal feeling in this matter; I have not, I am only anxious lest the truth should suffer; lest the precious and immortal souls of our young people should be endangered by the poison which Brother Easterbrook is giving them. I informed the secretary of his heresy, friends, because he has given the people a distaste for the truth, which, if under-

mined, will be calamitous, and cause the devil to gloat. If he is allowed thus to continue, friends, we shall have a race of infidels nurtured in the bosom of the Church, and encouraged from the pulpit. Any departure from Methodist doctrine as taught by John Wesley means death to our enterprises, ruin to our churches, and everlasting ruin to untold thousands of immortal souls. For truth I have given my life, and for truth as taught by our fathers I am willing to die."

With this Brother Bowman sat down. Evidently he expected a burst of applause from the gentlemen on the committee, but he was disappointed. Only one weak "Hear, hear," was heard, and a look of pain rested on the faces of many. And instead of a vote being at once given to ask Easterbrook to resign, which he had anticipated, there was evidently a feeling of sympathy with the young man.

The president again spoke. "You have heard the charges against you, Mr. Easterbrook; you have also heard your superintendent's reason for bringing this matter before us. What is your reply?"

"I would like to know if this is all, sir; whether Mr. Bowman has any accusation against me for idleness, for inattention to duty, such as not visiting the sick, and not trying to help *all* with whom I have been brought into contact."

"I have nothing to say on that score," replied Mr. Bowman, curtly.

"Mr. President," said one of the youngest men on the committee, "I have been given to understand that a letter has been sent to Mr. McLellan by the Church with which Mr. Easterbrook has been most intimately acquainted. I think it fair to Mr. Easterbrook that he should hear that letter; it may possibly have other charges, and I think he should know all the accusations against him before he gives either explanation or defence."

Mr. McLellan arose and said that a letter had been sent to him, and signed by many people. Whether it was sent at the instigation of Mr. Easterbrook or not, he would not say, but from its tone he should think he had something to do with its composition."

"Mr. President," said the gentleman who had asked for the letter, "I submit this to be unfair. The secretary has no right to try and influence the mind of this committee as to the authorship of this letter. We do not want the secretary's opinion, but facts—facts which cannot be gainsaid. This is a most important time in our young friend's life, and certainly perfect fairness should exist. Mr. President, I should like this letter to be read."

"Mr. McLellan, kindly read the letter," said the president.

As the secretary rose to do so, Jabez spoke.

"I should like to say, Mr. President," he said, "whatever the purport of this letter may be, that I know nothing about it. This is the first intimation I have had that a letter of any sort had been, or was going to be, written.'

"Thank you, Mr. Easterbrook," said the president kindly. "I believe your statement to be true in every particular. Mr. McLellan, will you kindly proceed?"

Hereupon Mr. McLellan, with no very pleasant voice, read a letter from the Heathertown Church, which bore upon Easterbrook's work in the neighbourhood. It stated that the church had doubled its members during his stay, also that his influence in the neighbourhood was a very blessed one. That the worst characters in the village had been reclaimed, and that men who had been sceptics, drunkards, and wife-beaters, had, through his instrumentality, been brought into the Church, and were now working among their former associates, and trying to reclaim them. It went on to say that he was generally beloved by rich and poor alike, and that his visits had been gladly welcomed by all classes. Reference was also made to his endeavour to help the social life of the

people. How he had inaugurated a fund for the help of the poor and needy, and how a reading-room and a working-men's institute had been established through him, which resulted in increased intelligence, and a considerable reduction in the attendance at the public-houses. With regard to his preaching, it was helpful in the highest degree, which statement was corroborated by the fact that the people "heard him gladly." He tried to deal with present needs and present difficulties, and did not trouble so much with the needs of the people in the times of Jeremiah, or even of the Puritans. The character of his preaching might be easily summed up. He preached Christ, not theories about Christ, but Christ Himself, whom he regarded as the key to history, the true life of men, and the revelation of God. The letter concluded with an expression of sincere regret that the young minister should be placed in a false position, and trusted that the committee would dismiss the charges made concerning him as unworthy of consideration. About 200 signatures, all being the names of members of the church, were affixed to the communication, which fact the secretary was not going to mention, but it was brought to the committee's notice by the young man who had first mentioned the existence of the letter.

"Is this the extent of the communication concerning this brother?" asked the president.

"It is all I have received," replied the secretary.

"Then we will come to the consideration of the charges that are made."

Each member of the committee settled himself to listen, while Jabez, with beating heart, waited for the first question of the president.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ORTHODOXY *versus* HETERODOXY.

"THE first question I have to put," said the president, "is this: You are accused of not believing in the Inspiration of the Bible; is this true?"

He would have put it in a different manner, but he knew the opinion of those around him, and he did not want to have it said that he had in any way countenanced a charge of heresy. Moreover, he had faith in Easterbrook's abilities to extricate himself from any difficulty in which he might be placed.

"It is not true, Mr. President," replied Jabez.

"You totally deny the charge, then?"

"I do, sir."

"You deny the statements which Mr. Bowman has made, do you?" Here the president read the charge again.

"I admit, sir, that Mr. Bowman has stated a part of the truth. He has stated in part my opinion with regard to the central teaching of Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes, but I deny the conclusions he has drawn from them."

"Let us come a little closer to this matter. You say Mr. Bowman has truly stated your views with regard to the central teaching of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Perhaps it would simplify matters if you were to state yourself what you do believe?"

"What I said, sir, was to the effect that sin destroyed

our powers to see the works of God in their true light. When a man had, through sin of any sort, squandered away his life, opposed his best impulses, and puddled the fountains of purity, he could never see what God would have men see. This, undoubtedly, Solomon had done, and with the result that he burst forth with a bitter wail, and summed up everything in life in one sad sentence, 'All is Vanity.' This was not true. Nothing that God made was vanity; consequently Solomon's teaching was not in accordance with what was highest and truest."

"Then you would not regard him as a safe teacher?"

"I do not regard life as vanity, sir."

There was silence for a second or two, then Mr. Bowman spoke.

"If I might be allowed to speak, sir, I would like to point out how contradictory Brother Easterbrook is. He said he believed in the Inspiration of the Bible, and then told us that he did not believe in the teaching of Solomon. Would Brother Easterbrook kindly give us a definition of Inspiration?"

"I shall have to inform Mr. Bowman," said the president, "that he is here to-day not for the purpose of discussion, or to ask Mr. Easterbrook questions, but simply to substantiate his accusation. Only members of the committee have the official right to discuss this matter, or to ask him (through me) any necessary questions."

"Then I would ask Mr. Easterbrook, through you, Mr. President, to give us a definition of Inspiration," said Mr. McLellan.

"You hear the question, Mr. Easterbrook?" said the President.

"Might I be allowed to reply, sir, that I did not know I came here to be examined; hence I made no preparation, and certainly the question of Inspiration is too big for me to define at a minute's notice."

"I submit, Mr. President," said Mr. McLellan, "that this is evading the question. Does Mr. Easterbrook accept the definition of the Methodist Churches?"

"Mr. McLellan will kindly repeat it for us" said the president.

"Certainly I *can*, and will. It runs as follows:—'Inspiration is such a degree of Divine assistance, influence, or guidance as should enable the authors of the Scriptures to communicate knowledge without error, whether the subject of such communication be then immediately revealed, or whether they were things with which they were before acquainted.' That, sir, is Horne's definition, a definition that defies criticism. Measure Mr. Easterbrook's statement by it, and we find that he has taught that which is in direct opposition to the Methodist theology."

"Do you accept the definition as expressing your views on Inspiration, Mr. Easterbrook?" asked the president.

"I do not regard any definition as sufficient. The question of Inspiration is too big to be summed up in half-a-dozen lines."

"I submit again, Mr. President, that this is pure evasion," said Mr. McLellan. "This definition is embodied in our Connexional Documents, and if Mr. Easterbrook does not accept it, he is opposing the spirit of our body and departing from its teaching."

"Forgive me for asking a question, Mr. President," said Jabez; "but am I to understand that I must believe what the Connexional Deed teaches, whether it is in accordance with the teaching of Christ or not? For example, in the Book to which we have referred, I find that its writer said he had proved the value of many things, such as music, great works, pools of water, gardens, and riches, and that he had found them all vanity. He also tells us that he hated life, for that also was vanity, and that there was nothing better for a man to do than to eat and drink, although that

also was vanity. That the end and remembrance of the wise man was no better than that of a fool, and that both wisdom and foolishness were vanity."

"Allow me to suggest, my friend," said the president, with a smile, "that you confine yourself to answering the questions that may be asked of you; at the same time, I may say that the Connexional Deed is the standard of your faith while you remain in our ministry."

For some moments there was silence, then the president spoke again.

"Perhaps it will help matters if I ask you whether you believe the Book of Ecclesiastes to be inspired?"

"If you give a broad meaning to the term inspired, I do, sir."

"Yes, but inspired just as all the Scriptures are?"

"If you mean that the Book of Ecclesiastes is inspired as St. John's Gospel or St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, I shall say no, sir."

"Then you think Solomon did not communicate knowledge without error?"

"I think, sir, that Solomon, because he had wasted his best life, was led to look upon things not as he would have looked on them had he kept pure and holy."

"Then wherein would come in his inspiration?"

"I think he was inspired in so far as he was joined in spirit with his God. For example, read his prayer at the dedication of the temple when he was pure, and we find it far more ennobling than the Book we have been talking about."

"Might I suggest that we pass on to the next question, Mr. President," said one of the committee. "I think we see our friend's position."

This being agreed to, the president passed on to the question of the Atonement.

"You are accused of saying, Mr. Easterbrook, in general

effect, that Christ did not pay the debt of man's sins, and that all theories of the Atonement were insufficient for man's salvation. Is this true?"

"The logical issue of my teaching may have amounted to that, sir, although I have never made one statement that in any way attacked the theory of the Atonement."

"Mr. Bowman will kindly state again what Mr. Easterbrook said," said the president.

"Certainly, sir," replied Mr. Bowman with great cheerfulness. "He said that nothing could undo, or take away, the effects of sin; and on another occasion he said that what men wanted, was more than our talks about the Atonement, and that no theory of the Atonement could save."

"What is your answer to this, Mr. Easterbrook?"

"If I remember rightly, sir, what I said was this. Sin was death, and that every sin we committed, was so much death entering the soul. That the ripe Christian of seventy years, who had spent his life in God's service, had a greater life, and knew more of God, than another man of seventy who had come to give the dregs of his life to God, just because he feared death, and thus he was a loser because of his sins."

"Then you do not believe that Christ's death takes away the effect of sin?"

"I cannot see how it does, sir."

"What do you believe it does, then?"

"I believe that when a man accepts Christ, He takes away the sin itself, sir."

"But not the effect of past sins?"

"I have yet to learn that it does."

"Might I ask the young man if he has ever been converted?" said a member of the committee.

"I love Jesus Christ," replied Jabez.

"How do you know?"

"Because I try and do what He tells me."

"And what is that?"

"To be fair, and brotherly, and charitable."

At this several of the committee smiled, for this gentleman was not renowned for being charitable.

"Then if you have been converted, do you not feel that Christ has taken away the result of your sins?"

"No, sir. I began to try and be a Christian when I was a little over seventeen; if I had begun at twelve I should have had five years more of life, five years more of communion with God, and knowledge of Jesus Christ; those five years were comparatively wasted, and nothing can undo the past."

"Then you do not believe that Christ paid your debt?"

"I am paying it myself every day, sir, because I am poorer than I should be if I had devoted those years to God's service."

"Then," said the president, "supposing at a service you were conducting, a vile, sinful man sought pardon for sin, would you not tell him that Christ forgave him?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, if he is forgiven, is not his debt paid and the past undone?"

"I do not think so, sir. The prodigal son was forgiven, but it did not undo the fact that he had wasted his substance, and wasted years of his life. He was freely, lovingly forgiven, but he could not be as though he had never left his father's house at all."

"Then you do not believe in the Atonement?"

"Certainly I do, sir."

"Will you explain how?"

"First, I believe in the Atonement, in that it made God and man 'at one,' in that it reconciled man to God. I believe in Christ's life and death as a means whereby man might come to God. Not that it altered God's relation to man,

but man's to God. I believe in the mighty force it is in the world, the greatest spiritual power ever known.

"But do you believe that Christ's death takes away the result of, say, seventy years of sin?"

"Undoubtedly it does, in that the moment a man receives Christ, he receives life; but I cannot see that it makes a man to be as though he had never sinned."

"Mr. President," said one of the committee, "I want to hear that answer again. This is a crucial point. The teaching contained in our Connexional Deed relating to this matter is that Christ's death does take away the result of sin, that He bears the result of our sin in His own body."

Jabez gave the same answer again, which was much discussed, after which the president asked another question.

"You say you believe in the Atonement, although not in the aspect of it contained in our Connexional Deed; if so what did you mean by saying that the world wanted something more than a theory of the Atonement?"

"I meant this, sir. Any theory of the Atonement must be necessarily imperfect; and what the world wants is not imperfect theories about Christ, but Christ Himself. Christ did not say, 'If theories about Me and My work be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me,' but 'if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me.'"

After some more talk about this, the president passed on to the next question.

"You have been accused of preaching against eternal punishment, Mr. Easterbrook. Is this true or false?"

"False, sir."

"Will you read the charge again, Mr. McLellan?"

"Mr. Easterbrook is reported to have said that God never does anything without a moral purpose, and whatever He does for man, is for man's good."

"Is that true, Mr. Easterbrook?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, will you tell me what is the moral purpose of eternal punishment?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Then you do not believe in the doctrine?"

"I have never enunciated a belief for or against the doctrine, Mr. President. I was preaching on the Fatherhood of God, and I simply let fall the expression which has been referred to."

"But can you not see the logical sequence of such a statement?"

"I have only to do with the truth of the premise, sir. I could not preach a perfect God if He did anything without a moral purpose, or if He did not act for the good of the creatures He has made."

Little more of interest was said after this; and soon after Jabez was told that he might take his leave and go into the vestry to wait until called for.

It would be painful to myself and readers to follow the discussion that took place. The modern school argued against the ancient school, the younger men pitted themselves against the older men until confusion was the order of the day. Musty theologies of two centuries ago were quoted as authorities, while the spirit of Christ's life and teaching was taken but little into account, and after two hours' wearisome talk little good had been done. The question, however, resolved itself into the following facts. That the standard of their faith was that drawn up by certain divines more than a century ago. That the belief of ministers must be tested, not by great general principles of truth, but by formulated creeds, and consequently the question at issue with regard to Jabez was, not whether his position was logical, and in accordance with great principles of truth, but whether it agreed with their current theology, or rather the theology which was current a hundred years ago. His fitness for the ministry was not owing to his ability to lead

men to higher lives, but to his soundness in the faith. The truth was, the committee were in a dilemma, for not one of them could reasonably deny any proposition Easterbrook had laid down, and could many of them have had their own way, they would at once have dismissed the case. But here was a fact. They were all held by the iron hand of a written creed. They had promised allegiance to it, and, as a consequence, they were logically, ay, and morally too, prohibited from seeking truth, because they had promised to abide by the teaching of a hundred years ago. Did Easterbrook's position agree with the general teaching of history, science and Christ? They could not deny that it did. Not one of them really believed that life was vanity, not one of them would say that there was nothing better for a man to do than to eat and drink, and that the end and remembrance of a wise man was no better than that of a fool. Not one of them would say that a man had not to suffer for his sins even although he might be forgiven, neither would they say that God ever did anything that was not for men's good; or, if any did, it would be because their eyes were blinded by prejudice. But this was not the question at issue. It opposed a system, it was contradictory to a set of doctrines drawn up a hundred years ago and more, and they wanted, at least some did, to tie down all men's thoughts to it.

Some, with liberal tendencies, would have dismissed the case, but they dared not; it would form a precedent, it would allow men to remain in the denomination and yet have liberty of opinion, it would admit of the fact that their creed was not perfect, and so for a long time confusion prevailed.

At length a resolution was proposed to the effect that Mr. Easterbrook be allowed until July to reconsider his views, and that, meanwhile, he was to promise not to preach on controverted questions. This, after some discussion, was

passed, and Jabez was called in, and informed of their decision.

"Am I to understand that I am to promise that I will not preach the consequences of sin, and the universal beneficence of God?"

"Not in the way you have been preaching it. It is the decision of the committee that you must avoid teaching such doctrines as you have been accused of doing; then you will be allowed to re-state your views in July."

"But these truths are real to me. I believe in them with all my heart!" cried Jabez.

"You have heard the decision of the committee," said the president.

"Will you allow me to wait until to-morrow morning before I give my promise?" asked Jabez.

"You shall be allowed until to-morrow morning at eleven."

Jabez went away from the room with his head in a whirl. He had never expected this. He had thought that the result of the committee's deliberation would be far more decisive. It did seem such an easy thing to promise; it would be an easy matter to satisfy the committee by a little manipulation of words in July. Evidently several were in sympathy with him, and would gladly help him out of the difficulty. What was the use? No one was expected strictly to abide by such promise, because truth presented too many sides. Why not promise, then, to preach only accepted truth until July, and then give such answer as would satisfy them, mentally reserving the right to put his own interpretation upon his words? It would be hard to leave the Church, hard to be expelled because of heterodoxy, especially when he could so easily remain.

He went to a restaurant and got a little refreshment, and afterwards passing by a large church, saw the announcement that a minister of whom he had heard much would conduct service there that evening at eight o'clock. Immediately

Jabez resolved to go, and after passing an hour or two among second-hand book-stalls, he found his way thither. Had the minister known Easterbrook's temptation and difficulty, he could not have spoken more pointedly. His subject was the finding of truth, and he pleaded for absolute liberty of thought, unfettered by the authority of men. "Brethren," said the preacher, "I would not sign a creed, and promise to abide by it, even though I had written it with my own hand. The writing remains, but thought enlarges. A written word is dead; but the mind lives, grows, receives, and thus what is true to me to-day, may, when I have thought more and received new light, become false. Do not let your minds, your souls, be fettered; place your lives, your mental and spiritual lives, in the care of the Spirit of Truth, and let Him lead you onward and upwards, in spite of the cries of men. Is a man to believe what he likes, then? Such a question is foolish. A man cannot be what he likes, but what he must. There are forces around him and in him, forces which come from the Father of Truth, and if he is a true man, they must shape his beliefs. Meanwhile we need not fear, for God lives, and He will lead those who trust Him into right paths, He will lead them to Himself."

This decided Jabez. He thought long over what the preacher had said; but he had determined what to do. He knew his course of action would give great pain to his parents, but he could not hesitate now. God had given him truth, and he must preach it, and it would be a sin to promise adherence to what he did not fully believe; and even if he did, a written creed ought never to be a check, a restraint, for at best it could only be an imperfect representation of truth. Consequently when he stood before the committee, his mind was made up. He had prayed long and earnestly through the night, and felt that he must do his duty at all hazards.

"Well, Mr. Easterbrook," said the president, "and what is your decision?"

"My decision is to decline to give the required promise."

"But do you know the alternative, Mr. Easterbrook?"

"No, sir, I do not; but I wish to place my resignation in your hands to-day."

"What do you mean?"

"That I must cease being a minister of the denomination."

There was nothing boastful in this statement; it was simply the quiet utterance of a man who had made up his mind, and there was something noble in his face as he declared his intention of giving up that which was most dear

"I hope you are not doing this rashly," said the president, kindly. "This is not a step that you may take hastily."

"I am not doing it hastily, sir. But the promise you demand means the stifling of and keeping back my convictions, and my remaining in the ministry means more. It means that if I am honest, I must be true to the teaching laid down in the Connexional Deed, that I must teach nothing the logical sequence of which may oppose it. I could not do that, sir, and I say it after due consideration; for however much I may believe in it now, I may not be able to believe in it in future years. No creed can be the standard of truth for all ages, and if I remain in your ministry—if I am honest, I must teach, however much my mind might outgrow that which is there laid down."

"But it is founded on the Scriptures."

"Yes, sir, according to a certain system of interpretation of the Scriptures, which system may be false. And so, sir, if I am to be strictly honest, I must preach only according to that system. That supposes that God has no more truth to reveal, no more light to shed upon His Word."

They accepted his resignation. They could do no other. The laws of their denomination demanded that they should,

no matter how able and faithful he might be. And so when Jabez passed out of the room he was no longer recognised as a minister of the churches he loved.

I do not vindicate his action, neither do I condemn it. One cannot judge for another, one man cannot be the standard of action for another; but Jabez felt that he could not promise to remain true to any creed drawn up by human hands. It meant bondage to his mind, it meant narrowness to his sympathies, it meant, too, that he must shut out all light that would lead him to see that his creed was wrong. Thus Jabez preferred to be unfettered. With all his heart he believed in the evangelical aspect of Christian truth; but he felt that truth was too great and too sacred to be pressed down into a binding creed. And so he ceased to be a Methodist minister.

"Brother" Bowman listened to Easterbrook's answer to the president with great eagerness, left the room immediately after Jabez had gone, and went straight to a telegraph office, where he sent a despatch to his wife, which ran as follows:—

"Easterbrook's connection with our ministry has ceased."

CHAPTER XXV.

MARGARET FINDS GOD.

"YES, Mr. Ashton, it is true. I knew you would be sorry; but, you see, we who bear the name must follow the teachings of our leader and founder. It is a great pity the young man should have become unsound, and no one grieves more than I do. But the evil had to be removed, his doctrines did not tally with our standard theology, and, of course, he could no longer remain with us."

It was "Brother" Bowman who spoke. Ostensibly he addressed Mr. Ashton, but he really intended his remarks to be taken into consideration by Reginald and Margaret, who sat in the same room, especially as they had not seemed to appreciate either himself or his ministry. He had come to Heathertown that evening for the express purpose of having some talk with Mr. Ashton, and with a great deal of complacency gave expression to the remarks just quoted.

"But I am given to understand that he resigned much against the wish of many members of the committee?"

"Against many members of the committee! Just so. And why? Because many members of the committee are themselves heterodox. Because they themselves are untrue to the old Methodist theology. If I could have my way, every member of that committee should year by year be obliged to sign their names to the doctrines contained in our Connexional Deed before they be allowed to sit in judgment upon others."

"But is it not a fact that the younger men have a tendency to broaden the sympathies of the whole committee with regard to doctrine?"

"And is it not a shame that men should be allowed to sit in council who are not true to the faith of their fathers?"

"I don't know. Creeds and systems must change. They are simply opinions about truth, and all opinions are fallible."

"Yes, but if they don't hold fast to our doctrines, they should leave our ranks."

"I am not so sure. Reforms generally come from within. For my own part, I think Mr. Easterbrook was wrong in leaving our ranks. He is a young fellow of very considerable ability, and might have done much good by remaining. Credal tests do no good, but, from what I have seen, a great deal of harm. I know as a fact that they have caused much prevarication and dissembling. Creeds are stationary, and a living man cannot be, and while there should be an acceptance of great general truths, yet to fasten 1,000 or more ministers down to a strict form of thinking is to me unnatural."

"But, Mr. Ashton, what could we do without a defined set of doctrines?"

"Better than you do with them. Men, in spite of them, break away into paths anew, and are thus called heterodox. How many of our ministers to-day would accept wholly the creed of 100 years ago, which is supposed to be ours? Ask them whether they believe in certain doctrines, and they will answer in the affirmative, but they demand the privilege of explaining them in their own way. Why should this be? Do you think if you were to abolish credal tests you would have more so-called heterodoxy? Not a bit of it; but you would have more honesty, and that to me is the chief thing. And it must be so; while you have a defined set of doctrines, there will be an amount of sailing under false colours."

Evidently this was not what Brother Bowman had expected, but he had not sufficient manliness to oppose him further. Mr. Ashton was a rich man, and this champion for the truth worshipped gold, so he heaved a deep, pious sigh, and smiled vacantly.

Margaret had sat during this conversation listening eagerly, and when Mr. Bowman did not answer her father, she asked him if he knew whether Mr. Easterbrook had come back to Heathertown.

"He has not come back, Miss Margaret," said the preacher; "he has, I believe, gone to his home. When he will come here again I do not know. I have made arrangements that his pulpit is to be supplied by a safe, sound, young man, and I should hardly think he'd come back to this place again."

"Not come back! Pray why?"

"He'd hardly like to see the people to whom he has been preaching false doctrine, for which he has been as good as expelled. Poor misguided young man, he's to be pitied!"

"Pitied!" cried Margaret, her eyes flashing. "Pitied! By whom?"

"By me, and I trust by you, Miss Margaret."

"Pitied by you! Yes, he might be if you had succeeded in ruining him as you had intended. But such a man as you could not ruin him. Pity him! Why, you are not worthy to brush his coat, or to fasten his boots. He's been a true man. True to his convictions, true to the people he loved, true to his God, while you have been a base informer, a tell-tale, a spy."

She left the room as she spoke, while Brother Bowman sat staring at her in astonishment; then she rushed into her own bedroom, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

When she had first heard the news that Jabez was no

longer a minister, she seemed as one stunned. Although she could not understand why, it seemed to give her a blow, and all through the day she had wondered whether he would leave Heathertown or not; but when Mr. Bowman had come, and personally informed them concerning the matter, her indignation had no bounds, and when at last she trusted herself to speak, it was with passionate words that caused the self-satisfied minister to quail.

"I suppose he'll never come here again," she said to herself, sadly, "and if he does, it will not be to see me, for whom he can have anything but a kindly feeling. I used to despise him, and now I look upon him as one of the noblest men in the world. What will he do? Oh, God help him! How often I have had the name of God upon my lips lately. Do I really believe in Him yet?"

She was silent awhile, and then walked around the room, talking quietly to herself.

"How well do I remember," she said, "how, just after he came here, I said that true courage was unknown among men to-day; surely he has shown true courage. He has sacrificed his reputation as an orthodox believer, he has sacrificed a position that he holds most dear, he has sacrificed his friends, and perhaps his means of subsistence, for conscience sake. Oh! a deed like that makes me, in spite of myself, a believer in the religion that sustains him. But it is so enshrouded in mystery; it is so vague that I cannot grasp it. I wish, oh, I do wish, that it were as real to me as it is to him. I wish I had faith in a living Christ. What is it that inspires his life, aye, and what is it that inspires the life of that hypocrite downstairs? They are both Christian ministers. Is not Easterbrook noble in spite of his religion rather than because of it? Was it not Christianity that expelled him from the ministry rather than allow him to think honestly? But that can't be

Christianity. Christ never formulated creeds for men; He simply taught principles of truth, of which He was the personification. I'll read His life again. I have scarcely read it since I was a child." She picked up a New Testament and read. She turned to the Gospel of John and read it through, but she could not understand it. It was so deep, so mystical. She realised the tenderness, the pathos, the power of Christ's parting words to His disciples, but she could not understand them. It was too wonderful. Again and again she read the words of the Master, saying that He *was* the Light, the Life, the Truth, and the Resurrection. He taught that men must abide in Him in order to have life, that He was the source of truth and joy.

When she went to bed that night it was not to sleep, but to think; to think with an earnest desire to find the truth, and her thoughts were a kind of prayer, for she earnestly desired God, and yet she found Him not. Ever since she had come home from Windermere she had been trying to find the truth her parents and brother had found; she had shown a kindness which she had never shown before during the winter. She had been a ministering angel to many a sick man and woman during the hard, cold winter. She had given away much money to the poor, and had acted as a true woman should, and yet she had not found that loving Christ which Easterbrook so earnestly believed in. It is true that at times, when she saw the face of some poor sick one light up, on seeing her, she had felt a kind of joy unknown to her before; but it had quickly gone, and now when the news had come that Jabez had left the neighbourhood, perhaps for ever, a cold pain settled in her heart. Hour after hour she tossed in bed, without finding light or rest, until she began to despair.

"I have sought for God," she said; "I have prayed as well as I could; I have thought; and yet He has never revealed Himself to me in any way. I have never realised

that there is a God at all. Oh, that I could get rid of this burden of doubt and unrest. Would that I could find something real, something true. What was that text that Mr. Easterbrook preached from last? 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!'"

She got out of bed again, turned on the light, and read the chapter in which the words are written, and then she began to think again.

"Christ is dead, so how can I come to Him? Yet, no, He still lives, and if He is God, He is here. If I come, it must be in mind, in spirit, but how? Surely there are words like these somewhere written by one of Christ's disciples, they linger in my memory like a strain of music." She saw a passage mentioned in the margin, as having a connection with the one she had just read, and, turning to it, she read these words: "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you."

"Oh! If I only could," she said; "this burden of care is too great to be borne. Father," she cried, kneeling by the bed, "Christ Jesus, I want to be Thine, Thine wholly. Take me, for I feel that life is nothing without Thee. See, Lord Jesus, I give myself to Thee. If Thou art God, or if there is a God, take me."

It may be there are some who read this who will be incredulous about what I am going to write, but it is true. No sooner did Margaret give herself wholly to Christ, and trust Him as her Saviour, than her burden was gone, a holy peace entered her soul. Christ was no longer the memory of a great, good man, but her life. God was no longer a great unknowable force, but a loving Father. She could not see much, there were still many things which she could not explain, but she felt happy, because she trusted in the Great Father, and in His Son.

I remember when a little fellow, I had been visiting some cousins at a house some distance from my home, and when

night came on a storm swept over that part of the country, and I wondered how I was to get back; but about nine o'clock my father came, and wrapped me up warmly against the cold, and then led me out into the night. I could see nothing anywhere, for my face was hooded to shelter me from the storm. I could not tell where I was going, and the storm was very severe, but I had no fears, for my hand was in my father's hand, and I trusted him. On through the dark night he led me until we stopped at the door of a house, and then I found myself at home, where loving ones, some who have since gone to Heaven, welcomed me.

That illustrates something of Margaret's condition. She could see and understand but little; the night was dark, but she felt her hand in the great Father's hand, and so she knew she was safe. She realised that while religion might be partly received through the medium of the mind, yet it could not be wholly understood. It was a life, given by God. It was something to be experienced and to be lived. And so Margaret was at rest; she had accepted Christ, and she felt safe; she had trusted in Him, and her burdens had been rolled away.

If she had been asked to prove that there was a God that very night, she could not; nevertheless she knew that He was, because He had taken up His abode in her heart.

The next morning when she came downstairs a marked change was seen in her. She still had a strong, decided bearing; she was still quick and energetic in all her movements, but everything about her was more gentle. Her eyes were as bright as ever, but they were not hard and defiant; they burned with a new lustre; her mouth still retained its beautiful curve, but instead of a haughty, supercilious expression, there was to be seen gentleness and tenderness. Usually when she came downstairs, while her greeting was kind, it could scarcely be called affectionate; while now she

rushed to her parents and brother and gave them such a greeting as to make them wonder.

"Why, Margaret," cried Mrs. Ashton, "you seem very happy!"

"And tears are standing in your bonny eyes, my darling," cried her father. "Is anything the matter?"

"Only I have found— Oh, papa, mamma, Reginald, my life begins anew from to-day."

"Begins anew? How, why, darling?"

"The old burdens of doubt and care and unbelief are gone. I have found the reality of Christ's words."

"What, Margaret, my child; have you really found faith in Christ?" cried her father.

"It seems more than faith. It's knowledge, papa. I know God is, because I realised Him as my Father."

I am not going to try and portray what further took place. I could not truthfully do so. Words are too poor to describe our deepest feelings, and it would be almost a mockery to begin to tell the joy that was felt at Heathertown Grange that morning.

After a little time had passed, Mr. Ashton, knowing that Margaret had talked sufficiently of herself to be pleasant to her, changed the conversation by saying that he had received among his letters that morning two that would be interesting to them all.

"Indeed," said Reginald, "let us hear them."

"The first," said Mr. Ashton, with a sly look at his son, "is from Mr. Verner."

Immediately Reginald's face was crimsoned.

"And what does he write, dear?" asked Mrs. Ashton.

"He says that he and his daughter are going to accept our long-standing invitation, and spend a few days with us. He has retired from business, and is now going to rest quietly for the remainder of his life. So Reginald will have to take complete charge of the business while he is

here, as I shall naturally want to spend a good deal of time with him."

"But, father," cried Reginald, "if I have to take sole charge I shall almost be excluded from the house, and—"

"Then you'll not be able to spend much time with his beautiful daughter, eh, Reginald, my boy? I think I know your secret."

Reginald tried to stammer out a reply, but Mr. Ashton again interrupted him by laughing, and saying:

"Well, well, I expect we shall have to give Whitehead a little more work to do, which will not hurt him much, so that you may have a fair field. But don't build your hopes too high, my lad. I thought she seemed to favour Easterbrook a great deal, away up in Windermere, and no wonder, for he saved her life."

It was someone else who blushed now.

"That reminds me," continued Mr. Ashton, "that the other letter I have is from Easterbrook."

Instantly they were all attention.

"He writes as follows," said Mr. Ashton:—

"You will, of course, have heard ere this that I am no longer a minister in the Moortown circuit, so I write to you as circuit steward about some matters relating to your office."

Here followed a statement of facts that were entirely of a business nature, after which he referred to the ordeal through which he had recently passed.

"I have to thank you very heartily, Mr. Ashton, together with the many friends who drew up that letter and signed it, which was duly forwarded to the committee; also for the uniform kindness which I have received while I was among you. As you may imagine, it cost me a bitter struggle to give up the Church I love, to give up a calling which has been the joy of my life. But I could not remain in a fal

position. I believe that the majority of the committee would, if they had dared, have passed by the charges made against me as unworthy of consideration, but they dared not. The dead hand of the past was laid upon them. The formulated creed of our Churches stared them in the face, and while I subscribe to the general spirit of that creed, I cannot to the letter of it, and thus it was that their hands are bound. Why, I wonder, is it so? Can we not trust the leadings of the Spirit of God? Have men in past ages discovered all the truth, and printed it in a book? Surely it is an unnatural, a sinful thing, to put down a living man to a dead creed. For my own part, I could not promise that I would preach only according to a system of theology drawn up long, long ago. No, no, we have not explored far into the world of truth yet, and surely God would not have us search with fetters upon our feet.

"As yet I have not decided what I am to do—that is, in what particular way I am going to work for God. This I know, I am going to preach as long as I live. I am going to preach the Christ, Who is more real to me, and Whom I love more and more every day, as the Saviour of men. Where, and in what way, I do not know, but I know that my Father will lead me aright.

"I shall, all being well, run up to Heathertown in a few days, and then I will call and see you.

"With very kind regards to Mrs. Ashton, not forgetting Reginald and Miss Ashton,—I am yours sincerely,

"JABEZ EASTERBROOK."

After the letter was read, there was a silence for some time, then Reginald spoke.

"Is it a wonder Christianity does not spread faster when men like Easterbrook are served in this way?" he said, passionately.

"Never mind," said Mr. Ashton, Easterbrook has not

done his work yet. It is true this action will, perhaps, undo a great deal of work he has done, but he will go on working. I wonder now what means he has."

"He has about £100 a year of his own, so he will not be in want," said Reginald; "he told me this himself. Besides, I know as a fact that he must have given away the little salary our church gave him."

"Papa, could you not help him to get a church somewhere in this neighbourhood?" cried Margaret.

"I'm afraid not, Margaret. It is true the Congregational Church at Moortown would be glad to get him, and they are looking out for a minister; but to accept the pastorate there he would have to sign a musty code of doctrines, and that, you know, he could not do. Then there is the Unitarian Church, but Easterbrook believes heartily in the Evangelical faith; and as for any other place, an opening would be impossible. Never mind, God will open up a way somehow."

At this moment a servant came to the door, saying that a man wanted to see Mr. Ashton.

"What name does he give, Mary?" asked Mr. Ashton.

"Jack Brag, sir," replied the girl.

"Oh, Jack! To be sure. Tell him to come in, Mary."

There was then heard some whispering outside, and soon afterwards Jack came in, looking shy and awkward, but with an expression which indicated that he had some important business on hand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WELCOME HOME.

THE express train by which Jabez travelled to the Yorkshire Metropolis arrived all safely and in good time, so he was able to catch the local train which was to take him on to Heathertown, and which was waiting in the station. He had written to his landlady telling her by what train he should come, and as he drew near the village in which he had spent nearly two years, he began to think of his first arrival. Then, a carriage had been sent to take him to Mr. Ashton's, and he had seen how anxiously the people had been looking out at the door and window, watching "for t' new passon." But now all had changed. He was no longer their minister. He had been branded as a heretic, and no doubt Mr. Bowman had made his case appear as badly as possible long before this. Never again should he be allowed to preach in the chapel, which he had seen get fuller and fuller every month of his ministry, never again should he hear their glorious singing, or meet with the people he had learned to love. He expected that the old station-master would look at him askance, while the porters would grin at each other, while they touched their caps to him, and speak of him "as t' passon as got expelled." Thus it was that his heart was sad as the train swept into the station. But what was that crowd doing on the station platform? It could not be an excursion party, for that kind of party does not

start in the evening time. What then could have drawn them there in such large numbers? No sooner, however, did his feet touch the ground, than he heard a shout.

"There he is!"

"Who do they mean, I wonder?" thought he.

"God bless thee, Measther Easterbrook," cried the crowd. "God bless our minister."

The crowd gathered around him, and hemmed him in, so that he could scarcely move, most of them shouting vociferously.

"Gie me tha bag, Measther Easterbrook," cried one. "I'll see that tha noan carries thy bag to t' carriage."

"No, me; let me ha't, Measther Easterbrook," said another.

Old and young were there. Men with grimy but honest faces, and lads on whose chins the down of manhood had scarcely come. Old women were there, and young rosy-cheeked maidens. Some he saw were weeping, and some were waving their hats aloft, as if unable to express their feelings in any other way. But what surprised him most, was that *he* was the centre of attraction, *he* was the person whom the crowd had come to meet.

"What does this mean?" he said at last, when the noïse had a little subsided.

"It means as how we thowt as how tha shudden come whoam as though we car't nowt about thee, lad," cried one, who seemed spokesman for the crowd, "and soa we're come to give thee a bit o' welcome, tha know'st."

"Hi, that's it," cried another; "give 'im a cheer, lads. Now, then, three cheers for Mr. Easterbrook. Hip—hip—hurrah! Three times three, lads! Give it tongue. Now then, another!"

"But I don't understand," cried Jabez.

"But we do," said the spokesman, "and noa mistake."

"Ay," said an old woman, with tears in her eyes, "I

dunno who sud, if we sudden. God bless thee, lad; thou saved my boy Bill from ruin, tha did, and now hoo's as good a lad as ever stepped i' shoeleather."

"Ay! and didn't he come and visit my old man, when we thowt he wur dyin', and didn't he bring summut to ait for t' bairns? Ay, bless thee, lad, thou did."

"Never fear, Measther Easterbrook," said another, "we think nowt the worse about thee, because some fowk who think their sen's very good, tell lies about thee. That's it, lads, gi'e it tongue! God bless thee, Measther Easterbrook!"

They took him by the arm, and led him along, while expressions of goodwill and affection were heard on every side. These Yorkshire people had been moved, and they were bound, as they said, "to blow off steam somehow." So much was this so, that when they got him near the station gates, they carried him, as though they did not care to see him walk. When he got outside, another surprise awaited him. A carriage stood there, but there were no horses, and standing by the shafts were Jack Brag and Ned Stickfield.

"God bless thee," they cried, with tears streaming down their swarthy cheeks. "Ay, Measther Easterbrook, we are right glad to see thee."

They took hold of his hands and held them, while the crowd again gave a loud shout, which immediately after, however, became a jeer of derision, and, on turning around, Jabez saw the form of Mr. Bowman. That gentleman looked very smilingly on the people; evidently he was unaware of the meaning of the excitement, but he was soon enlightened in a way that was unpleasant to him.

"Three groans for the bloke as told lies about Measther Easterbrook," cried a voice; and instantly the crowd gave vent to some not very musical sounds.

"Friends," cried Easterbrook, "I hope you'll not repeat

that; for my sake let Mr. Bowman pass quietly into the station."

"For thy sake, Measther Easterbrook! Why, yon chap wur the one as made up stories about you, and said you did na' preach t' true Gospel."

"But we will not judge his motives, and for my sake, I think you will let him pass in quietly."

"For thy sake! Ay, we'll do owt for thee, lad," they cried; "but get in t' carriage, lad, tha must want some supper, and we knaw as how thy landlady is waiting for thee."

"But there is no horse in the carriage."

"Nay, we took good care of that," cried Jack Brag. "I went to Mr. Ashton and I asked for t' carriage. 'Ay,' says he, 'and the horses too.' 'No,' says I, 'we want noan of yer hosses. Members o' Parliament can get drawed in a carriage by men, and surely if they can get honoured, the man as has been a blessin' to the lot on us sudden ave hosses to pull t' carriage, and soa Ned Stickfield and me are t' boys to do it.' Jump in, Measther Easterbrook, and we'll tak tha da'an i' style."

But they would not allow him to jump in; they lifted him in as though he were a poor cripple instead of the muscular young fellow, who, a little more than a year before, had conquered the bully of the village; but when he sat down, and the carriage began to move, while the people cheered him, he could hold out no longer, and he sobbed like a child.

When they were come into the village, he found that a flag had been suspended from one side of the street to the other, on which was written the word

WELCOME.

How the boys shouted, to be sure, and how the men waved their hats, while from almost every window heads appeared, and handkerchiefs were waved. At length his

heart gave a wild beat. Was that Margaret Ashton's face he saw at one of the windows? Margaret's face with a glad smile upon it? Yes, it was! Surely this was joy beyond what he had expected to find.

At length this strange procession stopped outside the gate of the house at which he had lodged, for which he was truly glad. These extravagant protestations of affection were beyond anything he had conceived, and he felt he had not deserved them. Instead of allowing him to get out of the carriage, however, the spokesman of the party said:

"We ain't quite finished yet, Measther Easterbrook. Thou know'st by this toime, or, if tha dosen't, tha ought to, that Yorkshire fowk do'ant haaf do a thing, and so there's summat else to be done. Here, Mr. Reginald, come here and read this, and tha," beckoning to a man dressed like a minister on the outskirts of the crowd, "tha who's come to take Measther Easterbrook's place, listen to it too."

"No, do'ant read it yet," cried a voice. "I sud like to say a few words, if ye do'ant mind."

"Ay, let Bob Craddock spaik," shouted the crowd.

"I'm noan much of a scholard, mates, as most of you know," began the man. "I know nowt 'bout theology, or sich like. They say as how Measther Easterbrook disagreed with Solomon when he said that everything wur vanity and sich like, and how he isn't sound on some doctrines as I know nowt mich about, nor I don't know as as I care much, because I s'pose there's a lot of gibberish in Latin and Greek, and so on. But this I know, friends, I know I were a right bad un; I know as how I were a drunkard, and I know as how I didn't treat my wife ony too well; I know I wus black with sin. Well, I'd heard a goodish bit about Measther Easterbrook, and, I says, I'll go and hear what t' chap's got to say, and if he talks right out like a man. Well, mates, we've heard as how Measther Easterbrook didna' preach sound doctrine, and, as I said, I know

nowt 'bout that, but I know he talked straight ...e. I know he showed me up i' style, and then he preached a grand life which I could have by accepting Christ Jesus. I were fair copped, mates, and I were as soft as a bairn. Somehow he found out 'bout me, and he cum to me, and he's led me straight to Jesus Christ, and he's been a true friend to me; he told me to come and see him when I wur tempted to go to t' public. He's been a blessin' to my home, and my wife is a different woman to what she was afore he know'd us. Now, I'm noan able to praich a sermont, but I've been readin' t' ould Book—t' best Book i' the world, mates—and I find as how Jesus Christ said, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' Well, I believe that's true, and tha know'st how there's bin a lot on us turned reight about by Measther Easterbrook; and if such work is the fruit of heterodoxy—that's the word, I believe—why I hoap we shall have some more on't. But 'tesn't that, mates. I feel as how what he says is true. His sermons stick to me, for he preaches the Lord Jesus Christ, and he preaches the love of God, and he preaches the hell of sin, and that's true, mates; and so I say, spite o' all they say about unsound doctrine, God bless Measther Easterbrook."

At the close of this speech, which was much cheered during the delivery, cheer after cheer was given, until the hills echoed the sound of their lusty voices.

Then Reginald read an address which had been drawn up by the secretary of the church, and which was handsomely mounted and framed. It was very nearly a repetition of the letter which had been sent to the committee, with a few necessary alterations suited to the circumstances, and concluded with an earnest appeal to him to remain in their midst and continue the glorious work he had commenced.

There were two or three speeches after the pattern of Bob Craddock's, and then Jabez was asked to speak.

He arose from his seat in the carriage, and uttered three words. "My dear friends," he said. Then he looked at the address which had been presented, and again at the people, and tried to utter his thanks, but as he saw the eager faces, and swimming eyes of those who by God's help he had rescued from lives of misery and ruin, and remembered why he was there, he could not utter another word, and he, together with many a strong, brawny, rough Yorkshireman, sobbed like children.

The crowd broke up at last, and Jabez found himself alone once more. It was then that he realised something of the good he had been able to do. And he was almost glad for a moment that such circumstances had taken place as to reveal to him the love that was felt towards him; but as he thought of the injury the whole affair might do to the church and people, he was deeply grieved. Still he was glad for what he had done. He had been true to his conscience, true to his deepest convictions; and, after supper, he again faced the question as to what his future was to be. Should he remain in the village, as the people evidently desired him to do? It would not be difficult to get funds to build a church. But it would look like opposition, and many would construe such a proceeding as meaning that which was entirely opposed to his wishes. And yet it might be the right thing to do. If the man chosen to do his work were after the pattern of Mr. Bowman, he would not take long to undo a great deal of the work that had been done, and drive the people away from the church. Besides, it would be greater joy than ever to work among these people, now he knew of their affection for him.

"It is not a matter I can decide in a minute," he said to himself, after thinking some time, "and God knows I don't want to leave this neighbourhood. I wonder now why Miss Ashton came to that cottage and gave me a smile of welcome? Perhaps, after all, she was simply passing down the

village street, and stepped into the house until the crowd was gone by."

At this moment he heard a knock at the door, and immediately after his landlady came in saying that the Reverend John Beswrick, the new minister, desired to see him.

It was a trying moment for Jabez to receive the man who had taken his position; but telling his landlady to show him in, he anxiously awaited his entrance.

The Rev. John Beswrick entered the room immediately, without the slightest hesitation, and returned Easterbrook's inquiring look without being in the slightest degree discomposed. He was about twenty-three years of age, was quite beardless, and was dressed in strictly clerical attire.

"Sit down, Mr. Beswrick," said Jabez, quietly.

"Thank you, I will," he replied, in tones that showed he had been studying the orthodox ecclesiastical sing-song. He yawned immediately after he had spoken, as if to assure Easterbrook that he was perfectly at ease; then he looked around the room, noted the various articles of furniture, after which he pulled out his handkerchief, which was highly scented, and rubbed his mouth.

"You have very decent diggings here," he said coolly, looking at Easterbrook from head to foot.

"Yes, I have very good lodgings," said Jabez. "Might I ask the reason for the honour of this visit?"

"Well, yes, I came ostensibly to get those class books, but really to chat with you about the work."

"Indeed, I am afraid Mr. Bowman will not regard that as a safe method of procedure."

"Oh! that's all right. I just wanted to see the way you've carried on, so that I might remedy the points in which you failed. I find that things are in rather a bad condition, and I want to set them right."

"I am sorry you have found things wrong. I worked hard to get things right here, and I hope that——"

"Oh, don't bother, my dear fellow. You couldn't be expected to do things according to the best method. Of course you've never been to college, and didn't have the drilling we fellows did."

"Oh, you have been to college, have you?"

"Yes, I've just come from there. When your case was decided, you know, they sent to the —— College for a man, and I offered to come."

"Well, I hope you'll be successful here."

"Thank you, I think I shall. You see we've been well drilled yonder, especially in general deportment, and in our dealings with the people. Besides, I always stood well in sermon classes, and I have no doubt things will soon begin to look up. Besides, I've just got to understand the people, and I'll wind them around in style, I can assure you."

Jabez was silent.

"It's a pity," he went on, "that you didn't go to college. You would never have got into your present fix if you did."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Why, you see, we are led into a system of study, and we think according to circumscribed rules, and fellows can't get wrong then, don't you know."

"Then you are perfectly sound in the faith?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly sound. I had such a good tutor, you know. Besides, I don't bother about discussable subjects, it's no good; and see what trouble you've got into by thinking, instead of just letting your mind rest."

"But how would you manage if one of your flock came with some difficulty?"

"Why, bless you, I'd soon settle them. I've been to college, you know, and studied logic."

"Just so," said Jabez, rising, and taking down the books mentioned by Mr. Beswrick, "I will not detain you any longer, and I know your time must be fully engaged in preparing for the pulpit."

"Oh, no, bless you, you are not detaining me. I can rattle off a couple of sermons a week easily. You see I've been drilled in system, and I have two or three splendid books. One called *Three Thousand Anecdotes*, and three others containing outlines of sermons, so you see I can easily knock off a sermon."

"I've no doubt," said Jabez, "but as I am very tired, I am sure you'll excuse me."

"Of course, I will; and, look here, I might be able to set you right on some of your theological points; you see I have all the tutor's lectures on the doctrines, with my own notes. Say so, and I'll bring them down."

"Thank you," said Jabez, "I'll let you know if I require them. Good-night."

He settled himself in his chair again, but had no sooner done so, than his landlady came in again, saying that two men wanted to see him.

"Tell them to come in," said Jabez, wondering who they could be, and immediately afterwards Ned Stickfield and Jack Brag came in.

"Sit down, my friends," cried Jabez, heartily; "this is kind of you to call again."

"I hope as how ye are rested a bit," said Jack, as he sat down.

"Why," said Jabez, smiling, "have you some work for me to do?"

"No, no," said Jack, "I was only afraid as how we wur bothering ye, by coming reight after ye'd been travellin' like."

"No fear, I'm not too tired to have a talk with you."

"Well, then, we'll come to business straight, for I know that thou'st be wantin' to get to bed i' gooid time."

"Just so. Go ahead then."

But both Jack and Ned were silent.

"Ned," said Jack after a while, "tha mun tell him about it, tha'st had more schoolin' nor me."

"Noa," said Ned, "tha promised to say it, so no backing a'at."

"I hope," said Jabez anxiously, "that nothing is wrong."

"No, no," cried Jack, "but 'tis like this. Bob Craddock said as how he knowed nothin' 'bout doctrines and sich like, but he knowed he wur a bad un, and he knowed as how thou wert the means o' makin' a man o' him. Well, we know nowt about doctrines, but we know thaast done us more good than any other passon that ivver put shoe in Heather-town, or come to that, thou'rt the only one as ivver did do the likes o' us mich good. And we know more nor that. We know as how thou'st given a sight o' money away to t' poor and sick, and must a got rid o' all thy wage. So Ned and me got talkin', and Ned says, says he, 'It's easy eno' to mak' a row, 'cause Measther Easterbrook 'ev come back, but that won't gie a beefstak or put a pound i' his pocket, and now he's out o' t' church he'll ha' no pay day.' 'Well, what wouldst a do?' says I. And so we've put our heads together, Measther Easterbrook, but we don't want onybody to know as what we've thought about, and we just come to ask yer consent like. We're both i' good work, and work full time, we ain't a bin lakin for two month, and we're both savin' a mite o' brass, and we thought as 'ow thou couldst do wi' a few shillin' a week until tha gets another church. Say tha will, Measther Easterbrook, nobuddy 'll be out the wiser, and we'd like to do somethin' for thee wha's bin so gooid to us," and Jack laid half a sovereign on the table.

Jabez had been excited all the evening, he had been considerably moved by the people's protestations of affection, but this, to him, crowned all the rest. Especially when he remembered what these two men were two years before, was this peculiarly touching, and he thanked God as he had never thanked Him before. He could not speak, however, but sat looking at them both in mute astonishment, while both Jack and Ned nervously watched him.

"Say thou'lt let us help tha," said Ned Stickfield. "I can't spout, as tha know'st, but I'm strong, Measther Easterbrook, as tha know'st, and I con work, and I *will* work night and day for the mon as has made a mon o' me. Say thou wilt," said Ned, blubbering, and wiping the tears from his eyes with his grimy hands. "Why," he continued, "see what I wur when I first met wi' thee up in yon lane, and tha lickt me, and I like thee all t' better for it, and see what I am now. I know I'm none ower good, but I'm teetotal, and I'm tryin' to do right. I'm earnin' good money, but ef I can't help thee enoo ony other way, why here goes t' pipe," and Ned took his dirty clay pipe from his pocket.

"Stop," said Jabez; "I can't allow you to go any further. You don't know how much I realise your kindness, or how glad I am that you are in the position to help me; but, my friends, I am not entirely dependent on any profession for my living. I have quite enough to live on, at any rate until I start to work again, and so I will not deprive you of your hard-earned wage."

"Well," cried Jack, "I'm right glad as how thou'rt well off for one thing, but nowt ud give me more joy than to know I wur workin' a mite harder for ye, and thou'lt have to promise this, Measther Easterbrook, that if ever thou wants a paand thou'lt let me know."

"And me, too," cried Ned.

The poor fellows looked so disappointed that Jabez promised them, which seemed to cheer them wonderfully, and then Ned began to fumble with one of his pockets.

"I hope as 'ow ye won't be offended, Measther Easterbrook," he said, "but I wanted to bring summat to thee, and I know as 'ow ye get some sweets sometimes to clear yer throat afore ye go to praich, so I brought some," and Ned laid a pound of toffee of various kinds on the table.

"And now we mun be off," said Jack; "but we want to say afore we go, that tha mus'na goa away from Heather

town. Good-night, Measther Easterbrook," and then both of them took their leave, telling him to cheer up, and not to mind "what fouks ud say."

Then Jabez retired to rest, happy in his heart, although not knowing what his future might be. He still loved Margaret, and his love seemed as hopeless as ever, but he believed in God, and so the burden was light. His work was apparently taken out of his hands, but he knew that he would somewhere and in some way find more; and then he fell asleep, little thinking that the very next day he would see a path opening up, with the brightness of Heaven shining upon it.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GIPSY'S ADVICE.

How often it is that plans and prospects in life look, while we are under the influence of some pleasant excitement, promising and joyous, but when the excitement has gone, lose all their charms and their pleasant promises. This was so in the case of our friend. When he laid his head on the pillow on the evening of the day on which he had received such joyful surprises, all things looked hopeful and no care sat heavily upon him, but when he awoke the following morning all was changed. The difficulties in his way, which seemed as molehills, now rose like great mountains before him. Hope had sunk low in the horizon, while the sky had become full of black clouds. He arose, however, determined to try and make the best of everything, when, looking at his watch, he found that it was nearly ten o'clock, so feeling rather ashamed of himself he rushed downstairs as quickly as possible.

On the breakfast table he found several letters, most of which had come by post, but he noticed that one had been delivered independent of the help of a Government official. After reading the others he turned to this, wondering from whom it could be. On opening it, he found that it contained an invitation to spend the day at Heathertown Grange, and expressed the hope that as he was for the time released from his ministerial work, he would often pay

them a visit. The letter was written in a stiff, old-fashioned handwriting, and was signed Alice Ashton.

"This is kind of Mrs. Ashton," said Jabez to himself when he had finished reading, "and it will be pleasant to spend the day there, and yet I dread to go. I shall be simply putting myself in the way of temptation. After all, it seems to me that the gipsy's words are coming true."

He was not long, however, in finishing his breakfast, and was soon after walking up the broad carriage drive which led to Mr. Ashton's house.

"What a long time it is since I was here," he thought, as he stopped at the door of the house. "Well, it is a good thing after all that I have not visited here much. It would only have set people's tongues wagging. As it is, the gossips generally think I am engaged to some young lady at home."

He rang the door bell and was immediately admitted. To his great surprise, on entering the drawing-room, he found himself face to face with Mr. and Miss Verner, who were sitting chatting with Margaret and Mr. Ashton.

It was not altogether pleasant thus to meet, especially on the part of Jabez. In spite of everything that had been said on the previous night, he felt very sensitive on the subject of his withdrawal from the ministry. When he had last seen these people he had a position, now he was without one of any sort. As a consequence of this feeling, he flushed painfully on meeting with these friends, which flush Margaret interpreted as indicating his passion for Miss Verner.

The party soon got at its ease, however, and they talked freely on various matters until the lunch bell rang, and they adjourned to the dining-room, after which the ladies repaired to their rooms, and Mr. Ashton and Mr. Verner to the smoking-room to have a quiet chat, and most likely a nap. Seeing that he was alone, for a little while at least, and knowing that he could make himself perfectly at home in

Heathertown Grange, he wandered away quietly by himself.

It was a beautiful afternoon. The winter, which had seemed so loath to depart, had at last taken flight, and now as the bright May sun shone upon the green grass and budding leaves, the early lambs frolicked in the meadows, and the birds sang blithely as they flitted from bough to bough.

Almost unconsciously he chose the same path that he had traversed many months before, when he had accompanied Warren and the two young ladies on their walk from the gipsy tent, and when he reached the summit of the hill on which they had met, he looked down the valley where he had first seen the old woman, who, somehow, had had an influence on their lives. Could it be that he saw a caravan there now? He did, and beside it was a tent like unto the one he had seen on the foot of the mountains away up in the Lake District.

"I wonder now if it can be she?" thought Jabez. "She said we should meet again. Can it be that she knows anything about my life and future; can her eyes see what mine cannot? At any rate, I'll go down and see."

He was not long in reaching the gipsies' abode, but could at first see nothing. At length, however, he saw, sitting on a stool by the side of the caravan, the old woman who had so much interested him.

She seemed in no way surprised at seeing him. She simply gave him a nod of recognition, and beckoned him to come closer.

"And so we meet again," she said, and there was a kind of chuckle in her voice. "You did not believe in the gipsy when she told you last August that the Fates had in store for us yet one more meeting. Well, young man, are my words true? Have not things changed?"

"You are right, mother. Things are changed; yet not in the way you predicted."

"Why, I heard in the village but yesterday that young Jabez Easterbrook—you see I know your name—no longer ministers to the people, and Lorenzo stood among the crowd on yester-e'en and listened while men applauded thee. Said I not that you would change your profession?"

"You did; but I have not changed it."

"How can that be?"

"It is true that at present I am not in active work, but I shall never cease being a minister. I shall soon find another sphere of labour."

The old woman looked curiously at him, and then muttered to herself, as if in anger. Then she said:—

"And where is the dark-eyed maiden with whom I last saw thee?"

"She is at her home."

"Ha! You have seen her lately."

"Well, what of that?"

"What of that? Ho, ho! Yes, what of that to be sure?"

"Say what you like to me, or about me, but kindly do not talk about Miss Ashton."

"Young man, thou art bold in thought and in deed. Thy mind is strong and clear. Over-conscientious as thou art, that doest things as matters of duty which other people would pass by as of little import; thou canst see far into many problems that are deep and mysterious; but in regard to that lady thou art blind, blind."

"I do not understand you, mother. I am not a ladies' man. I am not versed in their ways."

"No, thou art not, and yet thou lovest the very ground whereon she stands. Be as bold in that as thou art in other matters. Think for thyself. Do! Dare!"

The old woman rose from her stool as she spoke, her black eyes flashing. At times, in spite of gipsy attire, and the effect of her mode of living, her appearance was imposing, and now she seemed deeply moved, her face worked

with contending emotions, and she spoke with more authority than at most times, just as though she were an old Jewish prophetess. She lost much of the gipsy dialect too, and used the pronouns "thee" and "thou" instead of "you," which she used on ordinary occasions.

"Young man," she said, "I know thou hast little faith either in me or my art; but I have, from the first moment I saw thee, taken an interest in thee. Why this is so, I cannot tell; but it is true. Well, I watched thee closely when I first saw thee in this spot, and I saw that thou wert beginning to love the dark-eyed Margaret. When we met on that stormy night, and I watched thy face again, I saw that thou wouldst willingly die for her, so much didst thou love her. Then I watched her face. And what did I see? Look, stubborn boy, on my wrinkled face. Does it speak of passion, of grief? Bah, you think the old gipsy never loved; but you think wrongly. Once, when I was as young, ay, and as beautiful as thy heart's desire, I loved. Loved! Yes, as thou canst know nothing about; but he is dead, and a weeping willow waves sadly over his grave. The love I bear for him enables me to see love in others. Dost thou think I did not read her heart? Do I not know the secret of her life?"

His love for a moment overcame him.

"And what did'st thou see, mother?"

"See! Thinkest thou I would betray a maiden's secret? say be daring, be brave."

Jabez was silent.

"I know not now if ever we may meet again. I am tired of my roaming life. Were I not so old I would go home to Italy to die; but I cannot go. I would like some place of rest for my tired feet, until they lay me in the grave."

"And why not rest, good mother? Surely you have amassed enough money to spend the remainder of your days in some quiet cottage."

"It cannot be! I will die as I have lived for so long and the cold blue stars shall watch my departing spirit as it leaves the body and soars into the unknown; but whether we meet again or no I should like to help to make thee happy, and thy happiness will depend on thy courage. Be bold."

"Be bold in what?"

"Stay no longer here. True maidens show their love, if it be true, in times of adversity. Away! Ease thine heart, and know thy fate," and with a wave of her hand, the gipsy found her way to her tent.

"Strange," murmured Jabez, as he left the old woman. "Strange that she should speak thus. How different she is from the orthodox vagrants that infest our country. She is, indeed, a seer. I wonder now if her close observation has led her to think that Miss Ashton cares for me? Does she, I wonder?" It was the first time that Jabez had seriously thought of such a thing, and the thought made his heart beat wildly. And now he felt his love for her surging in his heart again as he had never felt it before. He remembered how she had looked when he had seen her at the cottage door the night before, and what a glorious light shone in her eyes as he had met her that very day. He did not know of what she had found, he had scarcely dared to hope it yet, she had seemed so positive in her unbelief; and so while he loved her more than ever, he was without a particle of hope of ever winning her for his bride. "The gipsy told me to dare," he thought, "because, perhaps, she fancied Margaret might care for me; but how can I dare I am without profession, and in the eyes of many I am disgraced. Dare! It would be more than daring to offer myself to her. It would be an insult. No, no. My secret is mine and I'll keep it. The keen-eyed old woman alone knows of my folly."

He hastened back across the fields, and on entering the

grounds of Heathertown Grange again, saw Margaret and Violet sitting beneath a shady chestnut tree which stood on the edge of the lawn.

He fancied they had not seen him as he hurried by, but in this he was mistaken. Margaret had caught sight of him, and as they were just then talking about him, she flushed deeply.

"Yes, Margaret," Violet was saying. "I think he is a very noble man, and I am glad he has left the Methodists, for I have hopes that he will join the Church of England."

"He never will," replied Margaret.

"Why? Does he not believe in the English Church? Does he not respect the work it is doing?"

"I am sure he does; but he will never sign his name to a written creed; he will never sign away his liberty of thought. He will go to work somewhere; how, I do not know, but he will be a blessing wherever he goes."

"I did not ask you the other night, when you told me you had become a Christian, Margaret, but did Mr. Easterbrook help you?"

"I should have been an infidel to-day but for him."

"And yet your dislike for him has been so marked."

Margaret was silent.

"I know," continued Violet, "that you do not feel bitterly towards him now, but you have done, and yet, Margaret, I believe he worships you."

"Me? Violet, nonsense."

"I have seen it, Margaret. I watched him that day among the mountains, and I pitied him. I saw how furtively he watched you and Mr. Warren, and how anxious he was about you, and I have seen how terribly wounded he has been when you have appeared cool and indifferent towards him. Mind you, Margaret, I do not think he will confess his love to you, but I am sure he feels it nevertheless."

The subject was terribly interesting to Margaret, and she laughed almost bitterly, as she said—

"Naturally he would never speak of such a thing, because he cares nothing for me, and if he did, he would not He thinks I am an atheist."

"No, not because he thinks that, but because he is so sensitive and conscientious. Had he remained a minister, he would have been poor, and that would have hindered him; and now, having no position at all, he will never dream of doing such a thing; he would think it an insult to you. And so, although I am certain he almost worships you, you need have no fear of his troubling you."

"Let us change the subject," said Margaret; "he cares nothing for me, and if he did—well, then it would not be right thus to talk about it."

"Just so," replied Violet; "it is scarcely right when his love is hopeless; and yet I pity him."

"He is not a man to be pitied," cried Margaret, "for he is one that will surmount difficulties, not sink under them."

Soon after this the whole party joined them on the lawn, and the older folks watched while the younger ones played tennis. Seldom had their eyes rested on a fairer sight. The two maidens were both so beautiful, and yet a contrast to each other; the black hair and eyes of Margaret, together with her clear, dark skin, setting off the golden hair and blue eyes of her fair-skinned friend. Reginald, too, while he did not possess the stalwart frame and striking features of the young minister, was a young man of whom any mother might be proud; and a look of loving pride lit up Mrs. Ashton's face as she watched him. The set which they played proved a very exciting affair, for the parties were pretty evenly matched, and played well; and yet I think each of them would have played better had they thought more about their opponents serving and returning of balls, and less about their partners.

The set was finished at length, however, and soon the ladies returned to their rooms to dress for dinner. At any rate, Mrs. Ashton and Violet Verner did, but Margaret, when she entered her room, threw herself on a chair, and began to think. Although she had not shown it at the time, the words of Violet made a deep impression on her, and she thought long on what she had said.

"Does he, I wonder?" she mused. "Is it possible that my fears about Violet were groundless after all? They must be, for he does not appear to be in any degree interested in her, and yet she thinks he would not dare to speak to me of his love. Why? Not because our sympathies are not in common, for, thank God, we both believe in the same Saviour now, and that he will soon find out; but because he is poor. Is that a sufficient obstacle? Would I refuse him because of that? No, I would work for the man I love with my own hands if it were necessary, and live in a cottage. And yet we are separated. Does he love me, I wonder? I wish I knew. He must, and yet he will not tell me of it. Violet thinks I dislike him, and so does he, and yet I would —yes, I would die to make him happy," and tears dimmed her great, dark eyes.

And thus proud Margaret Ashton was humble at last. Her soul had been filled with the life of the Saviour, and thus her old haughty feeling was taken away, while the bitterness she had felt, ever since she had found out that she loved Jabez Easterbrook, was gone; and she wanted him to tell her his secret. But she felt that he would not do it; he fancied she disliked him, while he knew he was poor, and these would be insurmountable barriers in the way. And she—she could not let him know of her love. Custom forbade it, her own maidenly modesty forbade it. Must they be ever separated, then? Perhaps Jabez would go away, and find a church somewhere in some distant town, or perhaps he might leave the country, and then they

would be separated for ever. Could she not in some way let him know her interest in him without telling him in so many words? She thought, and thought, but she could not see a way, and so she went down to dinner, without hope that she would ever be united to the man she loved, yet feeling assured that God her Father would do what was best for His children.

She was silent as they sat at the dinner table, but listened intently while Mr. Verner asked Jabez to consent to come to Liverpool, where he felt sure he could find good work to do.

"No," Jabez replied, "I cannot give my consent, yet, at any rate. The people here are loud in their demands that I should stay amongst them. That, I am afraid, is impossible, and yet I do not like the idea of going far away from them. I have an idea in my mind; but it is so vague that I dare not talk about it for a time; and there are difficulties that appear almost insurmountable."

"Might I ask what kind of difficulties?" asked Mr. Verner.

"I would tell you, sir, if my idea were anything like definite, but at present I dare not. My position is rather a peculiar one as yet; still I have faith that the right way will open up if I try and do my duty."

These words were a great comfort to Margaret, so much so, that after dinner, when they stepped on the lawn, she talked quite cheerfully.

It was a glorious night, and, for the middle of May, the air was quite warm. The sun had just set, and the western sky was resplendent with the reflection of its glory. Reginald looked longingly at Violet, and sighed as though he were afflicted with heart disease, while Jabez looked thoughtfully away across the hills, which were becoming dim in the fading light.

"I say," cried Reginald, as though a new thought had

come into his mind, "what a grand night for a walk; let us all take a stroll across the fields."

Mr. Ashton smiled; he saw through Reginald's ruse.

"You young folks had better go," he said, quietly; "you will enjoy it all the better without us."

"What do you young ladies say to it?" cried Reginald, eagerly.

"I should like it very much," said Violet.

"And I too," said Margaret.

"And, Easterbrook, what do you say?"

"I shall be delighted to go," said Jabez, feeling that he was like a moth that was fluttering around a bewildering light. The young ladies were soon ready for their walk, and the four together stood outside the lawn of Heathertown Grange.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Reginald.

"Let us go on the same path that we went that night after Mr. Easterbrook's reception service; it is just such another night."

It was Margaret who spoke, and there was a strange light in her eyes as she did so.

"Just the thing," cried Reginald, joyously, leading the way with Violet by his side, while Jabez followed behind with Margaret, each longing that the other should know something that they dare not tell, yet not knowing that words of terrible interest to them both, would soon be spoken.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARGARET'S WOOING

THE party walked quietly away across the green fields towards the valley that lay in the distance. Reginald was very joyous, and made the hills resound with his merry laughter; but Jabez scarcely spoke. He seemed to be on the brink of a great precipice, and only dark mists hid from his sight the dangers of the situation. Margaret, too, was strangely silent, as though she were weighing some alternatives in her mind, and knew not what was right. Presently, however, Jabez saw that Reginald and his companion had wandered far ahead of them and that he was alone with his life's love. How grand and stately she was; and how beautiful she looked beneath the light of the silvery moon. It was no wonder he loved her. God had made her to be loved, and yet he felt his love was hopeless. At length they came to the gully at which they had stopped on the night when our story commenced, and again they listened to the beck that trickled merrily down the valley.

"You remember the first night you stood here, Mr. Easterbrook?" said Margaret.

"I do, indeed, Miss Ashton."

"Things have changed since then."

"They have, indeed. You remember what a wretch Jack Brag was on that night, and yet see what he has become. I do not know when I have been more moved than I

was last night, when Jack and Ned Stickfield came to me and asked to be allowed to help me, as they feared I had spent all my money, and was hardly in a position to get more. When I remember what those men were, and then think that with tears in their eyes they asked to be allowed to help me, I am more convinced than ever of the power and love of our great Father."

"Your ministry has been wonderfully blessed in Heathertown, Mr. Easterbrook."

"Do you say so?" cried Jabez, eagerly. "Do you really think it has been?"

"I do indeed," she replied.

"You are very kind," said Jabez, sadly, "but your idea of success and blessedness differs so much from mine."

"How do you know?"

"How do I know? Nay, Miss Ashton, surely you need not ask that question."

"Jack Brag, the drunkard, has been changed, and is now a respectable member of society. Is there no chance for me?"

"Yes, yes, but religion, Christianity, appeals to the heart, to the conscience as well as to the head, and you—"

"Yes, I have wanted to explain everything in my own way and have seen my foolishness."

"What, do you really believe in—"

"I believe in God as my great Father, and in Jesus Christ as my Saviour, and the burden which has been making my life almost unbearable has been rolled away."

Jabez did not speak. He looked silently up into the deep blue sky, and his lips moved as if in prayer, then after awhile he uttered the words, "I thank Thee, oh, my God!"

This confession of Margaret's burst upon him like a flood of light in the midst of darkness. The beck which rippled down the valley sang the songs of angels to him, while the night breezes seemed to him like the voices of a multitude of

the heavenly hosts singing to him, as they sang to the shepherds in the field of Boaz more than 1,800 years ago.

"I had been wondering what made your eyes so tender and your voice so much more sweet," he said, slowly; then he continued, "May I ask when you saw the light?"

Margaret told him, and then he remembered that on that very night he had been praying for the maiden he loved.

"Forgive me, Miss Ashton, if I do not talk much yet. This news is more joyous to me than ever you can imagine. God knows how it will help me in my dark hours; help me, perhaps, when I am far away."

They wandered down the valley by the side of the beck, and followed the zig-zag path, hardly knowing whither they went.

"Why do you talk of going away?" asked Margaret. "Surely there is enough work for you in this neighbourhood, and God has need of you here. You can do more good than a dozen strangers who may come among us, whom the people do not know and cannot trust."

"That may have an element of truth in it; but were I to do so, my action would be misconstrued. Many of the gossips would say I wanted to work in opposition to my old church. And you know how lies spread and what harm they do?"

"But if the people want you?"

"Even then I am afraid it would not be right. If I stay here I shall encourage groundless hopes, and longings will be cherished which can never be satisfied."

How do you know? God gives us that which in our lack of faith we scarce dare hope for."

"Thank you, Miss Ashton. You are very kind, and it gives me more joy than you can imagine to hear you talking thus. I know you did not like me in the olden days; I know I angered you very much up at Windermere, and no words can tell you how glad I am to hear you asking me to

stay here. Yet, believe me, Miss Ashton, you know not what you ask. I appreciate your friendly kindness; but if you knew my hopes and longings, you would be, perchance, the first to bid me go."

The truth which Margaret longed to know was uttered now. The thin veil was torn aside, and she saw his heart although he knew it not. What should she do? Would it be right to let him remain in the dark, and thus be separated from him? People said it was immodest for the maid to tell the man that she loved him. But why should it be? Why should customs blight their lives? For she felt sure Jabez would not dare to speak while he was in the dark as to the state of her feelings. Could she write a book and tell him her story in the tale she weaved; or could she paint a picture and on canvas reveal the love she bore? But it would take a long time; before that could be done he might be far away and they might be separated for life. And yet he loved her, she felt sure of that, she heard it in every tone of his voice, she felt it in his very presence. Should she be bold and bid him stay for her sake?

"I am sorry I was rude to you up at Windermere," she said; "but it was not altogether without reason. If you knew how repulsive was the thought of Mr. Warren ever being my husband, you would not wonder at my anger."

"You do not care for Mr. Warren, then?" he asked eagerly.

"As a friend of our family, I have barely an interest in him, and as for anything else—as for accepting him as my husband, I would rather die."

These words caused the heart of Jabez to throb wildly; the gipsy's words came back to his mind, and he almost dared to hope.

"God knows how I want to stay in this neighbourhood. My heart is here; but, Miss Ashton—I—there, I cannot utter words that might anger you again. It would be wrong."

"And is it not wrong to hint at something with which I have something to do, and not tell me openly what it is?" She spoke with a touch of passion in her voice; for she felt how much depended on the answer that might be made.

"But I dare not say it, that is—May I, Miss Ashton; will you promise to forgive me if I anger you?"

"I promise."

"Then I could not bear to remain here and see you the wife of another man."

"You will never see me the wife of another man."

There was nothing unwomanly in these words as spoken by Margaret. She spoke them simply and clearly; and only a slight tremor in her voice indicated how much she felt.

Jabez looked at her, as though he scarcely believed the words she said. Ah! they might mean so much or so little.

"Miss Ashton," he cried, "God knows that I scarcely ever thought I could dare to say what I want to say. You speak of that night in Windermere. I uttered the words I did because I was madly jealous. Miss Ashton, I have dared to love you. To love you with my whole heart and soul. I loved you when you seemed to dislike me, I loved you when I thought you would soon be the wife of another, I have loved you without encouragement for my love. Now you know my secret, now you know the hope of my life, now you know what it is that binds me to this place, besides the work which I love and the affection of the people I have won. Now I have told you this, do you bid me stay?"

"Stay."

"Think, think! You do not know how much your answer means to me. I am a minister who is branded as a heretic, at least by many. I have no position; no church, nor hopes of getting any. I have only a few pounds a-year; just enough to keep me alive, and if I work here it must be against tremendous odds. Do you still tell me to stay?"

"I still tell you to stay."

Her voice this time was as clear as a bell, and she said the words as though she were proud to say them. The man she loved, had told her of his love for her, and her lips were opened now.

"And you will be my wife, Margaret?" He looked at the queenly creature by his side, and trembled as though he feared that all would prove a dream.

"I will be your wife, Jabez, if you will let me."

He spoke again as though he were not satisfied. His eyes burned like fire, and his voice trembled.

"Margaret, Margaret," he said, "you know not how much this is to me. I love you so. You have not told me you love me,—that is——"

"Jabez, I love you like my own life. I care nothing for poverty or position as long as I have you," and Jabez felt the great love of her life in her words.

They had stopped in their walk again, and for a moment were silent. The beck still sang its joyous songs. The summer winds still told their glad tidings; surely the angels smiled upon them as they watched these two plight their troth.

"Margaret," said Jabez, "the knowledge of your love has made me bold, may I—that is"—and he looked longingly at her rosy lips.

"Jabez," she said, "no man has ever kissed me since childhood, save my father and brother, so my husband shall be the first."

Then he folded the pure girl that God had given him in his strong arms, and their lips met in one long kiss, and thus Jabez and Margaret were betrothed.

They wandered on down the valley, and Jabez told her of all his struggles, and all his fears, told her how she had influenced his life, and how he had begun to love her, and how his love had grown; and she told Jabez all she had

felt; how she had been struggling through the dark days, with doubt and pain; told him of his influence on her life; of her finding faith in spite of the action of some Christian ministers towards him.

And what a change there was in her! Not two years before, as they had walked near this very place, she had been haughty, cynical, unloving, and cold as the blue stars that shone overhead; and now, while she was still Queen Esther in her regal beauty, her whole nature was softened by the wondrous power of love—love for her God, and love for a good man.

The minutes passed quickly away, as they, heedless of everything, save their happiness in each other's presence, followed the winding footpath; nor did they think that the hour was waxing late until they heard a shout, which echoed among the silent hills.

It was Reginald shouting; and he had come back with Violet to the junction of the footpath, close to the place where they had found Jack Brag. Giving an answering shout, they retraced their steps, both for the first time realising that soon their joyous secret must become known to others.

"Shall we tell Reginald, Margaret?" asked Jabez hesitatingly, as they drew near to where he stood.

"Not yet, Jabez, I want to tell father first of all."

"And when is that to be done?"

"When you like."

"Then, Margaret, my wife, it shall be done this very night."

She looked up with a glad look in her eyes, and yet not without a shade of anxiety resting upon her face.

When they came up to Reginald and Violet, Jabez thought they both looked somewhat bashful, and seemed to have a guilty feeling for having gone away; but Reginald said in a tone of banter,

"Where on earth have you two been?"

"I think," replied Jabez, "that we should rather ask you. You went away and left us as though you were tired of our company, leaving us altogether ignorant of your whereabouts. What secrets have you two been whispering to each other?"

"Secrets! What do you mean?" said Reginald, with a guilty blush.

"Come, Reginald, my boy," said Jabez, guessing by the tone of Reginald's voice and by Violet's evident discomfiture that something of importance had happened, "tell us what this means."

Reginald looked quite foolish for a minute, then turning to Violet, said, "Shall I tell them, Violet?"

Before she could reply, Margaret had caught the tone of banter; perhaps hoping thereby to ward off for a little while her own glad secret.

"Violet?" she said. "What do you mean by calling Miss Verner, Violet? Ah, Reginald, is your secret out?"

The young man threw his hat into the air.

"Out? Yes, 'tis out. Margaret, my girl, allow me to introduce you to your new sister Violet."

And Violet, blushing and happy, took Margaret's arm and walked away, telling her that she had promised to be the wife of her brother.

I am very, very glad," cried Margaret. "I know of no one else in the world that I would like for my sister save you, while Reginald is worthy of you. He is a noble fellow."

"The best and noblest man on earth," cried the blushing girl with tears in her eyes. "Don't you think so, Margaret?"

Margaret did not reply, but a glad look lit up her eyes as she thought of one that, to her, was a thousand times dearer and nobler than the brother she loved.

Meanwhile Reginald poured in Jabez's ear the story of his love. He told him that he had wanted Violet from the first minute he had seen her. How for a long time he was madly jealous of him, and how happy he was now, realising as he did that he had won this sweet girl for his wife.

Before they entered the house, Reginald again sought Violet's side, and thus Jabez and Margaret were left together.

"It was hard not to tell, Margaret, I am so happy. Did you not find it so?" said Jabez, eagerly.

She did not speak.

"Do you repent, Margaret?" said Jabez in a changed tone, "say, if you do. My darling, I love you too well to hold you to your promise if it gives you a moment's pain."

"Repent, Jabez!" she said. "How can you talk so? I could not speak because my heart was too full. I am so happy," and tears of joy rolled down her cheeks.

"God bless you, my beautiful," he said; and taking her face in his hands, he imprinted kiss after kiss on her rosy lips, while she sobbed for very joy.

A little while later Jabez stood face to face with Mr. Ashton, while Mrs. Ashton and Margaret nervously watched them both.

"You said you wanted to see me alone," said Mr. Ashton; "is your business so private that you would like the ladies to retire?"

"No, sir, I wish them to remain, if you do not mind."

Mr. Ashton nodded, and Jabez went on:

"I have to thank you, sir, for your great kindness to me since I came to reside in this neighbourhood. You have made many unpleasant things comparatively pleasant; you have helped me in many difficulties. But those days are over. I am here to-night without any position, without fortune, except the strength of body and mind which God has given me; I know I am very presumptuous, sir. I know that what I want to say would appear to many not

only unwise, but almost dishonourable; nevertheless, I have come to ask your consent to an engagement between Margaret and myself."

While Jabez tremblingly made this little speech, both Mr. and Mrs. Ashton looked at him as though bewildered, and astonished beyond measure.

"With Margaret, Mr. Easterbrook?" said Mr. Ashton at last; "are you sure you are not mistaken?"

"Perfectly sure, sir," said Jabez with a smile.

"Have you spoken to Margaret?" gasped Mr. Ashton.

"Never until to-night, sir."

"And she consents?"

"Yes, sir."

"Margaret," said Mr. Ashton, turning to her, "is this true?"

"True, papa."

"But," cried the old man, "I am astounded, I never dreamt of such a thing. Margaret has always appeared to dislike you, Mr. Easterbrook, and has taken but little care to conceal it, and now you ask my consent for her to be your wife. Might I ask how long you have been thinking of this?"

"Never until to-night, sir; but I think I have loved her from the first moment I saw her.'

"Bless me, you have? And you, Margaret? Why, child, you are actually crying! Mother, just look at this, our Margaret crying. Do you love this fellow so much then, you silly child?"

"I love him like my own life, papa—mamma," sobbed she.

"Leave us a bit, you silly children," said Mr. Ashton, "while your mother and I have a talk about this."

And so Margaret and Jabez walked away together; he eagerly asking her whether she thought they would consent.

"It's all right, I think," she said. "Mamma has found out my secret for some time, but she has been so true to me

that she has not even told papa, and I don't think he has ever dreamed of such a thing."

It was not long ere they were called in again, and Jabez saw with joy the answer he would get.

"Mr. Easterbrook," said Mr. Ashton, "this has come as a great surprise to me. I have never had the faintest suspicion of such a thing, although it seems my wife has; however things are—as they are," blowing his nose furiously, "and after all, I wouldn't have them otherwise. I know you have come at a time that to many would seem to give you but very little hope of success, but I have faith in you, and I have faith in my Margaret. I will not conceal the fact that I have had desires that when my child should choose a husband, he should have a fortune equal to that which I hope to give her, but—but—there—you have it, my boy. Manliness is more than money, and you have been a man. I give my consent, Jabez, to an engagement, and may God bless you."

"That is all I ask, sir, I know that I have no position to offer her just yet; but, God helping me, sir, I will win one, and not till then will I ask you to give her to me at the marriage altar."

"I believe you will, Jabez. I trust you so much that I do not ask you what you intend to do about your work."

I will linger no longer over this scene, for my pen is too poor to describe it adequately. A father's and a mother's love, aye, and the love of two such hearts as those of Jabez and Margaret, is too deep to describe in any language, but I do know that when Mr. Ashton knelt down to pray that God would bless their betrothal, the presence of the Great Father of all men was realised in their hearts, and each mentally resolved that their lives should be entirely devoted to the service of Him who died so freely for us all.

I will not try to describe the wild excitement and joy of Reginald and Violet when they were told the news, nor the

merry jests that were passed at the young minister's expense, nor how Jabez coolly turned the tables upon Reginald by asking him if he had asked Mr. Verner and Mr. Ashton for their consent to his union with Violet. It was indeed a joyful gathering. Margaret and Violet so pure and beautiful, and Jabez and Reginald so brave and so true, each heart beating with a holy affection for the maidens they loved. Mr. and Mrs. Ashton, too, looking so proud and happy, while the latter, with many a tear amidst her joyous laughter, told Mr. Verner, that while he had got a noble son added to his family, she had two more children to bless her declining years.

It was late ere the gathering broke up. Reginald had so much to say to Violet, while Jabez had more to say to Margaret, for she, hitherto so contained and self-possessed, gave way to her joyous feelings, and opened her heart more and more to her future husband, revealing depths of love and tender affection which he had never dreamed of.

By-and-bye, however, Jabez started on his road home with a thankful heart, and when he reached his doorstep, he stood looking out on the silent night. He could see God everywhere. The starry sky and the misty earth all told him of God's love to him, and he could hear Him speaking to him in the whispering of the winds and the faint chirp of some bird that he occasionally heard in the stillness. Then his heart went out to Him in prayer.

"Father," he said, "I thank Thee for all things. For the light and for the darkness, for the difficulties and the successes, for the storm and the calm. I needed them, and still need them all. Father, lead Thou me on. I cannot see my path plainly yet; but I do not fear, because Thou art with me, and where Thou art, all is well. Help me, Lord, and may I be true to Thy help. I thank Thee for the beautiful woman Thou hast given me; that Thou hast given light to her soul, so that she has been able to see

Jesus. Help us both to serve Thee truly, and may our lives be blessed indeed."

Then he entered his room, and began to think of the coming days.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WARDLEVALE.

About a mile from the village of Heathertown another village had lately sprung up. A coal seam had been discovered there, which had, when properly opened, given work to some 200 men and boys, and which promised in a very little while to become one of the largest collieries in Yorkshire. Not only that, a manufacturer, seeking to extend his business, and this place being suitable for the purpose, had built a large woollen mill, which was also the means of employing a large number of people. Thus it was that whereas, a few years before, only a few straggling cottages were to be seen in this valley, which went by the name of Wardlevale, now there stood a large, flourishing village, with a population of more than 1,000 people, which was considerably on the increase year by year.

In this village were several public-houses, which did, to use a proverbial term, "a roaring trade." The landlords of these places were pocketing week by week a considerable amount of money, while the people as a consequence were becoming more and more degraded. Indeed, Wardlevale was regarded as one of the most immoral places for miles around. For a man to live in Wardlevale was sufficient to stamp him as a bully, a gambler, and a drunkard; while the houses of the people who lived there were, in the majority of cases, in spite of the good wages they were getting, scenes of desolation, vice, and misery.

In this village there was neither chapel nor church. It is true that one or two sections of the Methodist Church had tried to hold open-air services there during the summer evenings; but they had signally failed, for such was the reception they got that they were glad to get away as soon as possible.

Of course there were a few respectable, well-behaved people living there; but these came to Heathertown on Sundays, when they wanted to attend religious services, and left the main bulk of the people to wallow in sensuality and vice. It is a well-known fact that where there is ignorance there is cruelty and base superstition, and Wardlevale was no exception to the rule. The people, in spite of the attempts that had been made to uplift them, remained densely ignorant, while their minds and bodies became daily more debased by the noxious poisons which they partook, and because of which the publicans were fast growing rich. It was no uncommon thing to see men and women lying around by the roadside, beastly drunk. During the last two or three months things had become worse than ever. A reservoir had begun to be made close to this place, for a distant town of some importance, which resulted in the arrival of a large number of navvies, whose only delight seemed to be to satisfy their animal appetites.

Jabez had become slightly known to many of the people in this place. Jack Brag, Ned Stickfield, and many others, who had been reclaimed by the instrumentality of the young minister, were personally acquainted with many of these men, and as a consequence the name of Jabez Easterbrook was not strange to them.

It was amongst these people and in this place that Jabez had determined to work. It was to the people who lived in this den of sin and darkness that he decided to preach Jesus Christ. He had thought of it during his stay at home after he had resigned his ministry at Heathertown; he had

continued to think of it after he came back, and the more he thought about it the more he felt it to be his duty. Only one obstacle had presented itself. It was his love for Margaret, and the madness of staying in the neighbourhood where she was when this love was hopeless. But this had been in his mind when he had told Mr. Verner that he had an idea concerning his future, and now that the obstacle had been removed, he determined to try and carry it out. Once he had thought of going to some large town and working in some back slum; but no city slum could be much blacker than Wardlevale, and, besides, he would have the advantage of being comparatively known, which would help him in his work.

He prayed long and earnestly about it when he came home that night, after Margaret had promised to be his wife, and the next morning he wrote the following letter:—

"DEAR FATHER,—I write to you to-day with a joyous heart, and I know that you, too, will be joyous when you read the news I have to tell you." Here he gave a description of his reception into the village, and then continued: "This is not all. The beautiful lady I told you about when I was at home, and whom I told you I hopelessly loved, has confessed her love for me and has promised to be my wife. I know you will at once think I am doing wrong to become engaged to her, because of her unbelief, but, father, that obstacle has been removed, for when I came back here I found my Margaret a humble believer in our Father God, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and so you see my cup of joy is full. But I can quite fancy that you are now thinking of my future work and position. Well, father, I am more convinced than ever that my work is to preach Jesus Christ, and this I have decided to continue to do. Do not think I am going to set up in opposition to my late church. There is no need of that. There is a village not far from here that

lies sweltering in sin, and in which there is not a place of worship. It is true that there is a church and chapel here to which they can come, but it is nearly a mile away, while on the other side of the village, about half-a-mile beyond, there is a little place of worship, but the life of these people is scarcely being touched, and here I am going to work. You told me that you would help me financially if I needed it, beyond the little income that I receive through my dear mother, and so I am going to ask you to send me £50 at once, which I am sure will be the means, not only of brightening homes, but in the hands of God of uplifting men and women.—Ever your affectionate son, JABEZ."

After writing this letter and posting it, Jabez walked down to Wardlevale. He peeped into several of the houses and entered the public-houses, where men and women were ruining themselves body and soul. Some of the people eyed him askance, others openly denounced him as a lazy blood-sucker of a parson, while others still admired his manly physique, and muttered to one another that "yon lad could feight a bit." Jabez, however, did not on this occasion have much to say to them ; but what he saw more than ever determined him to carry out his plans concerning this place, which everywhere revealed its degradation and sin. For a long time he looked around him to find a room wherein to commence operations, but failed in the attempt. At last he found his way to the proprietor of the mill, and after stating his desires, the gentleman told him that although he thought his scheme would end in failure, the people were so terribly degraded, he would let him have a room in connection with the mill. He had used it as a storehouse, and he should not want it for six months to come, during which time he would see how things went.

This was all Jabez desired in this respect, more, indeed, than ever he had dared to hope for. The best he expected

to get was some empty cottage, which he knew would be sadly inadequate to his requirements.

After this he went back to his lodgings and sketched out a bill; then he drew up a circular in which he tried to express his intentions and wishes. These people he knew were not to be easily won to anything, and the greatest care would have to be exercised during the first few months. He had read of a minister who was working in the South West division of London, who had done an incalculable amount of good to the working classes by reading newspapers to them on certain evenings of the week, and providing innocent and attractive amusements for them, and it was something on these lines that he decided to work. Thus it was that in his posters and circulars he invited as many as should care to come to the room he had taken on the next Saturday but one, when there were several things of interest that he thought they would like to hear.

The next morning the circulars and bills were in his hands, and he decided to deliver them himself, and thus perhaps be able to gain something of their confidence.

On his way he called to see Margaret.

"You did not come yesterday, Jabez," she said, after she had gladly welcomed him.

"No, Margaret, I was busy. See what I have done," and he showed his circulars and told her of what he had done.

"And, Jabez, you will let me help you, won't you?" she said eagerly.

"You, Margaret, you go among these people?"

"Why not? I have done nothing for any one in my life yet, let me begin now!"

"We will see, darling. I think you may. Yes, yes, I am sure, Margaret, you can do more than I."

"How? tell me?"

"Soon, I will. Shall I call again to-night, my darling?"

"Of course, you must. Every day you must call and report progress. If you don't, I'll punish you."

And so Jabez went to his work with a glad heart, seeing often, in spite of the miserable homes and the degraded people among whom he went, the great loving eyes of the beautiful girl he had won for his wife.

Had Jabez expected a warm welcome from the people, he would have been mistaken; had he expected civility even, he would have been disappointed; nevertheless, he took his circulars to every house in the village, and invited as many as he could to the meetings.

Some told him to go home and not trouble about them; others told him, with an oath, if he came there with his preaching he would be sent home in a bad condition; others, again, came to him complainingly, and ended their harangues by begging a few coppers, while not a few accepted the circulars with scornful indifference, or threw them away without a word.

Having done it, however, he ordered a carpenter to make him a book-case, and then went to the nearest town of importance, where he bought a large number of good books, which were interesting to the ordinary reader, together with the necessary requisites for chess, draughts, dominoes, and many other games. All these things he had arranged in the room he had secured, and then by the time he had secured a good number of popular magazines and made the necessary arrangements for daily papers, &c., the date he had announced for the first meeting had arrived.

It was with an anxious heart that he entered the room on this evening, and eagerly he waited for seven o'clock to come. Before that time, however, a large number of men had entered the room, some evidently looking as though they meant, to use their own terms, "a lark," and others evidently wondering what would turn up.

They were tolerably good-tempered, however, for it was

not late enough yet for the drink to have much effect upon them. They did not usually begin to get the worse for liquor until about nine o'clock, and as this meeting began at seven, they were kept away from the public-house at nearly the most dangerous time. Moreover, there was an amount of novelty in this meeting, and many who usually went to the public directly after five o'clock on Saturday had not done so to-day, as they wanted to know "what yon chap had to say."

By seven o'clock the room was full of men and boys, with not a few women, who had likewise come "to see the fun," as they laughingly told each other.

Mr. Ashton, Reginald, and Mr. Walker, the proprietor of the mill at Wardlevale, had asked to be present, but Jabez begged them to stay away. He did not want any of them to be well behaved because "t' masters was theer," neither would he accept the help of policemen—at any rate as yet. He wanted the people to get confidence in him, and then he felt assured they would listen to his message.

When he got up to speak, he was met with a curious reception. Some laughed, others hooted, one or two threw missiles at him, others good-humouredly said that "the chap sud be alla'ad to spaik."

"My dear friends," Jabez began, but did not for a time get any further.

"We're noan thy friends," they shouted, "we've nowt to do wi' parsons, or religious chaps of ony sort, so noan o' your bosh about callin us friends."

"Well, then," cried Jabez, "if we are not friends, it shan't be my fault, but yours. Now, do you know that, during the year and nine months I have lived in this neighbourhood, I have spoken at hundreds of meetings, and I've always noticed this about the people to whom I've spoken, they've always been willing to give me a hearing, and I don't think that you are the kind of people to be an exception to the rule."

This is always a sure way of getting on with a Yorkshire working man, however debased. It is a part of his creed to "give t' other side a fair amount o' gab," and so Jabez claimed his hearing.

"Now," continued he, "I am afraid I have been taking a great deal of liberty with you, but I have been looking around your little town, and I have been struck by this, that you have not among all your people here one place of amusement, one reading-room, or any place wherein to pass a pleasant evening. Then you know there are a lot of things taking place in the country which I am sure would interest you, but which many of you do not know anything about, because, through no fault of yours, you have never learned to read. And so I've thought upon a plan that I feel sure you'll take kindly. I've got this room here, and I've got some good books for those of you who like reading, and some games for those of you who like playing. The room will be open all day for any who have nothing to do, to drop in and spend an hour, where daily papers and good magazines will be always found, while in the evenings I shall be very glad to read the papers to those who can't read for themselves. And then if you'll bear me out in this matter, I think I shall be able to get you a nice pleasant entertainment now and then, with some good singing. Supposing I read you a bit now from the *Leeds Mercury*."

There was at the time a matter of great interest discussed in the newspapers, which most of these men had heard about, but of which they knew nothing definite, and as Jabez read and explained those parts which they could not understand, and gave a telling anecdote where they seemed to lose interest, the people forgot they had come to raise a disturbance and had entered heartily into the subject of his reading.

When he had finished, he asked any of them to say anything they felt disposed to say, or ask any question that might be troubling them.

"I thought thou wert a parson," cried one; "doesn't a main to preach to us?"

"I will answer that as well as I can," replied the young minister. "I am what is usually called a parson, but as I am, to use your own terms, 'out of a job,' I am trying to help you a bit rather than remain in idleness. Do I mean to preach? Well, I'll tell you. I am going to read the New Testament on Sunday nights to any that like to come and hear me, and then if there's anything anyone would like explaining, I'll do the best I can to explain it. Now I am sure you can't find any fault with that, for I'm not forcing you to come, and I am only going to read and tell you about the best man that ever lived."

"But we hear as how you wants to take away our beer," cried another, "is that soa? cause we wants none of that."

"Well, now," cried Jabez, "have I said a word about taking away your beer? Not I. Why I couldn't if I would. I only know that I do without it, and am a great deal happier and better because I do."

After this a lot of questions were asked, mostly respectfully, for Jabez had treated them respectfully, and it appealed to their manliness, and only a few of the lowest were rude. All their questions Jabez answered good-humouredly, evidently to the satisfaction of the people.

At length, a big burly navvy got up. He was the leader of a gang of ruffians, and having a great deal of shrewdness, and Yorkshire hard-headedness, besides a smattering of learning, he was regarded as one of considerable importance in the village.

"Look yer, youngster," he said, "thou'st spoken fair and plain. But there's mony a whitelivered rascal as can spak fair and cut your throat the same time, and soa we want to know somethin' abaat ye, tha know'st. Now, tha'ast come here thowt invitin', and we want no soap, but thou seem'st to be a lad wi' grit and pluck, and so we've just yeared what

ye had to say. For, mark ye, lad, if thou'dst a come here, tellin' us we're sinners, and on t' roid to hell, and praiche at us, we'd a made it as hot as hell for thee. But tha hasn't tha'st come to gi' us somethin' as we wants."

Up to this point the people had listened spellbound. The man had a strong personality, and Jabez saw that to win him would be to win half the battle, and when the rough men and women gave him a cheer, he determined, if possible, to enlist his sympathies at once.

"Come, mates," he said, "noan o' that, I want no cheerin', and I don't want for ony on us to be hoodwinked by a chap as can talk smart, we've yerd too many on 'em. Now, look here, these knicknacks, and papers, and books, and sich like must have cost money; now we ain't bin asked to pay for it, and I sud like to know who has."

"It was not my wish to speak of this," replied Jabez, "but since you have asked fairly, I must answer that I have paid for them myself."

"And tha doesn't ask for us to contribute?"

"Not a penny."

"Well, then, what put it into tha head?"

"It was the teaching of this Book," said Jabez, holding up a New Testament.

"Then read us a bit that 'ud tell thee to do it."

Jabez read clearly and distinctly, "As ye would that others should do unto you, do ye also unto them"

"Who said that?" cried the navvy.

"Jesus Christ."

"Well, it's reight, whoever said it. It's a long time sin' I looked at the inside o' a Bible, but I'm comin' to-morrow night. Mind ye, maister parson, none o' yer soap; if there is, thou'lt wish the day dark that thou put thee fut i' Wardlevale, but ef tha mains fair, we main fair. What thou'st done seems loike kindness, and tho' we're bad uns, we'll be jannock wi' t' lad as is jannock with us."

Thus ended the public part of this gathering, and Jabez felt he had not made a bad beginning. This man's sympathies were enlisted, and he had gained the people's respect. True, a large number left the meeting and went away to the public-houses, and sneered and jeered about "t' chap as had been fooil eno' to spend his brass i' sich stuff, instead o' 'aving a gooid spree," yet a good number, when they saw Bill Besowrick, their leader, stay, remained with him, and declared afterwards that they had never spent "a more jolly evenin' loike," and went home for the first Saturday night during many months in a sober condition.

It would be wearisome to trace, step by step, Jabez's work among these people, because with the exception of a few disturbances, which were raised by some drunken men, who were incited by the landlords to come over, the meetings were only interesting to those who attended. The Sunday evening Bible readings were at first apparently failures, but after awhile they found that the young minister made them so interesting that they were glad to go and spend an hour in this way.

For a long time Jabez was exceedingly anxious about Bill Besowrick. After the first meeting or so, he seemed to take but little interest, and while he attended the reading-room, and played many a game at chess, he was stolidly indifferent to the work generally, especially about the Bible readings.

"I expect it mostly gammon after all," he would mutter to himself, "and yet it's mighty strange as it should make yon chap work like he does to do these louts a mite o' good."

One night, however, his interest was more than ordinarily aroused. A big burly navvy had come in evidently for the purpose of disturbing. Jabez had been reading an article on the condition of the poor in our large towns. It described in graphic terms the state of their homes, the wages

they got, and their habits of life. It also entered into a discussion of the reasons for their poverty in a way which many papers scarcely ever seem to do, for fear of losing their popularity. While Easterbrook was in the middle of an interesting paragraph, now and then stopping to put in an explanatory word, this navvy rudely interrupted him, and became so abusive that it was impossible for him to go on. Several of his friends had likewise come in with him, and were now thoroughly enjoying the somewhat witty speeches of their rough companion.

"I must ask our friend either to be quiet or to leave the room," said Jabez at last.

"And thy friend'll do nowther," replied the rough.

"But my friend will be obliged to," said Jabez.

"I'll be d—d if he will," was the retort.

All this time Bill Besowrick had keenly watched the affair, but offered to take no part either side.

"Look here," said Jabez, his eyes flashing, "you'll not be the first man I've knocked down, and if you don't make yourself scarce, you'll find yourself in an uncomfortable position. We did not ask you here to make a disturbance, and I tell you that these men are not going to have their meeting upset by the likes of you."

At this the big navvy stood out in the middle of the room and shook his fist.

"Try it on," he cried, "I'm ready for thee."

Jabez went quietly down the hall, and looked at him straight in the eye. He was quite as tall as the navvy, but not so stout. He was not bloated, however, like the man, and his flesh was firm and strong.

"I have come here to be these men's friend, to be your friend, but I'll have no disorder here, so you go out."

The man for reply aimed a heavy blow at him, but it was warded off; and before he had time to repeat it he received two blows, straight out from the shoulder, that left him

stunned and bleeding on the floor, and in a minute more he was dragged out of the room, and the door was locked against him.

Instantly two of his companions prepared to spring upon Easterbrook, but before they could do so Bill Besowrick's form appeared.

"Noa, chaps, Measther Easterbrook's done reight, and he's a mon, theer, and I don't care who says as how he isn't, and I'll stick by the passon as can put a man to doors."

After that time Jabez was never molested or disturbed, for Bill Besowrick became his champion, and the work went on so successfully for some two or three months, that Jabez found his room too small, and his general arrangements altogether too limited.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FREE CHURCH.

When Jabez's work became known to the public, various opinions were offered by his old associates. Some said he was a true-hearted fellow, while others sneeringly remarked that he only wanted to win popularity by unheard-of and unscriptural means. Mr. Graysteel, after he had made an excellent bargain, according to his way of thinking, by a little sharp practice, said that he supposed the devil would be glad of the young man's work, because he would preach the heresy of salvation by works among these people, and keep back imputed righteousness. Mr. Bowman, however, was the most emphatic in his declamation, and he did not keep back his opinions about it even in the pulpit.

"Brethren," he said, to some of his friends who asked him one day what he thought about it, "this is a very serious matter. The young man is a tool of the devil. I thought, when I had exposed his heterodoxy before the committee, that we should have been rid of him, but now he is doing more harm than ever."

"Yes, Mr. Bowman; but you cannot deny that he is causing a great change in Wardlevale. When he went there, four months ago, all the public-houses were full, and people were almost afraid to pass through it. Now a better state of things exists; the public-houses are not nearly so full, and some of the worst of characters have been reformed."

"Brother Williams, don't be deceived. The young man is not preaching the old soul-saving doctrine. He says little or nothing about the plan of salvation, and seldom mentions the blood."

"Yes, but Christ said, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.'"

"Brother, don't try and twist the Scriptures to cover up his evil deeds, let the devil's friends praise up this son of Belial."

"Well," said another, after Brother Williams was silenced, "whether he is a son of Belial or no, things have wonderfully changed in Heathertown since he stopped working among us. Our congregation has diminished to half its former size, while many of our young fellows who needed a helping hand are going to the bad, whereas I hear that Mr. Easterbrook's room is full every night during the week, and crowded on the Sunday when he preaches."

"Yes, and what do they do during the week? Do they read the Bible? No. They play draughts and chess, and use other devil's playthings. They read novels, such as Sir Walter Scott's and Charles Dickens', besides secular newspapers. Where are their class-meetings and week-night services? I've never heard about them. And as for his Sunday services, why *you* know what he preaches."

"Well, Mr. Bowman, you, of course, know far more about doctrines than I do; but he has done what all other societies have failed to do; he has got hold of the worst men in that village, and they are altogether changed, and I am told that he has a scheme for building a large place there, and thus making his work permanent."

"Ah, the devil's work may prosper for a while, brethren," said Brother Bowman with a pious smile, "but it will soon have a fall."

"I don't know that it is the devil's work," said one who had not yet spoken, "and I think it is anything but a

Christian act to try and villify another who is trying to do his best. *You* know, Mr. Bowman, that the young man has done, in spite of all your talk about false doctrine, more than you have ever dared to do. Jesus Christ's teaching was, 'He that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, is like unto the man that built his house upon a rock.' Mr. Easterbrook evidently believes in that, while there are some who will crucify a man who does not believe as they believe, and yet not have the manliness or courage to dare and go among the fallen and uplift them."

"No, I don't practice knocking down men, my brother."

"Mr. Bowman, that insinuation is not fair nor manly. Mr. Easterbrook was a hero to act as he did. I did not agree with all Mr. Easterbrook said while at Heathertown, but we all agree that his life was exemplary and his work blessed. And I know this: If he knocked down a man, it was for the sake of order and for the man's good."

"Well, brother, if you agree with atheists in religious clothing, I am sorry for you; but I have no time for more words; so good-afternoon, and may the Lord lead you to see your errors."

And thus the people's tongues wagged; some were for him and some were against him; but the work went on. Soon after Jabez had shown the strength of his arms in ridding the room of the navvy, Bill Besowrick became a teetotaler, and his teetotalism became the stepping-stone to Christianity. It was a memorable night to Jabez when Bill came to him and asked him to tell him something more about Jesus, and the young minister afterwards confessed that he never heard anything more pathetic than Bill's questionings about Jesus of Nazareth. But when he realised that Christ was not dead, but a living Saviour, when he caught at the idea that He was standing at the door of his sinful heart, waiting to come in and purify it and give him true life, then a great light came into his eyes, and he leapt for joy. Bill led the

way for many more, until Jabez often had the unspeakable joy of telling men personally of the great present Saviour.

When in August his room became too little for the people who wanted to come, in spite of the hot summer weather, Jabez began to wonder what he should do. He scarcely dared to write to his father for more money, and he had none of his own to spare, and when one morning h opened a letter in which he found a cheque for £1,000, his joy knew no bounds.

The letter ran as follows :—

"DEAR MR. EASTERBROOK,—I have long thought how I could repay you for what you did for me and mine, a year ago. I knew then that to offer you money would be an insult to you; but now my chance has come. I have been delighted to hear of your work from time to time through my daughter, who, of course, gets her information from our mutual friend, Reginald; and when she told me that you would soon have to get increased accommodation if you were to successfully carry on your work, and that you did not know where the needful was to come from, I determined to send you a small donation towards your noble enterprise.

"Praying that you may be successful in the highest and best sense of the word,—Your sincere friend,

"HENRY VERNER."

A few weeks after this the walls of a new church began to rise, and were with all possible speed completed. After the knowledge of Mr. Verner's donation, several others had come forward and offered their help, so that Jabez had no difficulty whatever in accomplishing his work.

It was a happy day to our hero when the building was finished, and on the morning of its opening he proudly led Margaret from room to room and showed her the arrange-

ments he had made for the benefit of the people. One room was fitted up for a gymnasium, another for a library, another for a reading-room, another still for those who cared to play chess or draughts, and other simple, but interesting games. There were also vestries, lavatories, a small lecture hall, and a large one capable of seating six hundred people, where he purposed holding his Sunday services and public meetings.

"Is it not splendid?" cried Jabez.

"It is indeed, and you spend nearly all your time here, you have little or no time to devote to me."

"Are you in earnest, Margaret?"

"No, no, Jabez; but I have hard work to keep from being jealous sometimes. You are here so much. If I could come and help you I wouldn't care, and you know you promised that I should."

"And you shall, Margaret. I could not carry out my idea through the summer months in the old room; but now through the winter, I am going to try and have, every Monday evening, a pleasant entertainment, at most of which I shall want my Margaret to sing. Will you, sweetheart?"

"Will I, Jabez? I'll do anything I am fit for; you know I will."

"And you don't regret getting engaged to a poor Methodist parson, eh, Margaret?"

"Regret, Jabez! Why life has had a new meaning since May."

"And you love me, my queen?"

"Love you? How dare you ask such a question, sir?"

"Because I want you to promise something else to-night."

"What?"

"Promise me you'll do it."

"What, without knowing what it is?"

"Can't you trust me?"

"Trust *you*, Jabez? Why, of course I promise, only tell me what it is you want me to do."

"Not yet, young woman; curb your curiosity, and wait until to-night."

After this Jabez continued to tell her about his plans for the coming winter.

When five o'clock came, the small lecture hall was laid out for tea, and at a quarter past five the room was crowded with the villagers, who had come to the opening meeting. It was a motley crowd that gathered together. Many of the rough men were not Christians or teetotalers, but they had come, they said, "to see how t' things went like."

"I'm noan religious," said one rough man to another, "nor I'm noan teetotal, but I loike yon chap, and so I'm come up to help 'im on a bit."

And many could say this; for while a good few had accepted Christ, some natures were harder, and resisted the truth, but the leaven was beginning to work; they began to admire manliness and purity; the spark of manhood within them was being fanned into a flame.

When tea was over, they went into the large room where their inaugural meeting was to be held. Jabez had arranged for several liberal, true-hearted men to address the meeting, and the crowd waited eagerly for the words that were to be spoken.

After a hymn had been sung, and a brief prayer offered, Jabez arose to speak. How the people cheered him! not timidly, but real heartily as Yorkshire people can when they want to welcome a man they love. Men, who a few months before would have scorned to speak "to a parson," and who were steeped in vice, now waved their hats and shouted. Time after time he tried to speak, but time after time he failed to make himself heard, and when at length silence was restored, the voice of Jack Brag was heard.

"God bless him, lads, he's been God's own to—to—"

and Jack commenced sobbing like a child; and as the people realised what Jack had been, and what he was, there was scarcely a dry eye in the room.

At last Jabez began to speak.

"I have not very much to say, friends," he said, "but I want at this, our opening meeting, to say a few words as to what I hope we may accomplish, and as to our object in working. My ministerial history is known to many of you. My preaching was not regarded as sound by my denominational authorities, or rather, my system of interpreting the Scriptures did not agree with that laid down more than a hundred years ago. Now, while I maintain that I was true to the spirit of Methodist preaching, I would not promise to abide by the letter of any creed of man's making, and so my connection with that denomination was severed. Well, many of you will be asking what we intend to preach here. I answer, Jesus Christ. Not theories about Christ, but Christ Himself. Friends, the world has got tired of contradictory theories about Christ, about regeneration, and about the atonement. The churches have wasted their time in writing symposiums on theories of the atonement of Christ, while the world has been hungering for the Christ Himself. He is the key of all mysteries, human and Divine, He is the real cure for Socialism, and the real uplifter of mankind, He is the antidote for sin, He is the life and the immortality of men. I shall want no credal test for anyone preaching from this platform. But, perhaps, you'll get some atheists who will be wanting to come, someone may suggest. No, no. The man who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ will not care to come; there may be different conceptions of Him, but I have no fear but that Christ will be the rallying point for all our forces. Have we no creed, then? I trust we shall never set up a human creed and demand strict adherence to it. To do that would be crippling; it would indicate that God was not. day by day, telling us all we

cou d bear to know. I trust that this platform will be broad enough to admit all who love the Saviour, and that it will never be the resort of slaves or cowards. I hope to be here a great deal myself, and the great text of my teaching will be this: 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.' Those were the words of our Master as He spoke just before His death, and I believe that our hopes lie in abiding by the condition He lays down.

"And now as to general work. I have found this, that men and women, especially the young, want a place to which they can go when their day's work is over. The only place they have had is the public-house, which has been the means of cursing some of the truest souls God ever gave to the world. Well, we have tried to get an antidote for the poison of the public-house, and those who have visited our various rooms know what kind of an antidote it is. Then people have minds as well as souls. Well, we have tried to get the best, the healthiest, and the most instructive literature we can get into our library. We also need healthy amusement, and we have tried to provide for that. We shall have cricket, tennis, and croquet through the summer, and innocent indoor games in the winter. We have also a gymnasium, and when it is necessary we shall, I trust, enlarge our means, whereby we may be mutually benefited.

"Once every week during winter we shall have a pleasant entertainment, and once a week also we hope to be able to have a science lecture, whereby we trust to know more and more of ourselves and the world God has made for our use. We hope also to have Bible-classes and prayer-meetings, and thereby know more and more of God's love for us and His purposes concerning us. Every night during the week our doors will be opened, so that no one shall have an excuse to go to the public-house or other questionable places; and we shall try and make our meetings so helpful, so attractive,

and so blessed that the people will not care for their baser pleasures and unchaste enjoyments.

"This, I think, God would have every church do. John Wesley told his preachers that it was their work to save men. This we want to do. We shall try and advocate no sect or denomination; but Christ. Not that I do not believe in denominationalism; nothing of the sort. If the platform of the Methodist Church were broad enough, or rather if there were no human tests and human standards of belief, I would seek admission into it at once; but it is not our aim to advocate isms, but to advocate the Saviour of men."

I have here given the gist of Easterbrook's address, which was received with applause by the people, for they saw in it no promise of dead formalism, or theological hair splitting, but a living Christ; and as the other speakers followed on in the same liberal strain, with now and then a home appeal to the people, their hearts were melted, and they realised more and more the power of the religion of Christ.

The meeting was about to close, when a burly Yorkshireman arose from the audience.

"I rise, Measther Easterbrook," he said, "to propoase a proposition,—I think that's the right way to put it, mates, and if it isn't, well, then—that is—what I want to say is this. Measther Easterbrook have got this ere place built for the good of us chaps, and he's spent a sight o' brass, and he's had a sight o' brass given to him. Well, mates, I knows how many on us haven't too much brass, but I know as how a lot on us spent many a good shillin' at t' public afore Measther Easterbrook came here, an' so I propose a proposition that we mak' a collection to-neet, and that in the future we give as much as we can to help on t' good work, and to give a salary to our minister. I say our *minister*, friends, for that's what he is, and the best one that ever a church had."

To say this was carried with acclamation would be to give

a faint idea of the enthusiasm raised by this speech. These Yorkshire people, who, as a rule, are anything but liberal with their money, have still a high sense of honour, and they felt it right to contribute to the good work that was being carried on in their behalf; and that night before the meeting was closed a fund was established and a secretary and treasurer appointed.

Margaret had sat during the meeting like one amazed. I think it was perhaps the first time that Margaret realised the nobleness of the man she loved, or the work he had done, and when they walked home together that night she could scarcely speak, her joy was so great. When they neared Heathertown Grange, however, she looked up shyly at Easterbrook and asked him what he was going to speak to her about that night.

"I hardly dare tell you, Margaret," said he.

"Not tell me, Jabez? Not after I promised to grant you your request, whatever it might be?"

"Well, let me put it in the most favourable light I can then, my queen. You have heard me say that my father is a liberal-minded man and loved me much?"

"Ofttimes, Jabez."

"Well, he has retired from business. He was a farmer, and had rather extensive connections with the mining operations carried on in that part of the country. After settling up his affairs he finds himself exceedingly well off, and sympathising with me in my work, he has actually, during his lifetime, given me a hundred pounds a year, and that besides what mother left me, is enough, at any rate, to live on. And so, Margaret, I am going to ask for what is most dear to me. I want you to link your life with mine as soon as possible. I know that my income is very small; but I think I see my way to enlarge it, and if I cannot, why if you—"

"Not another word, Jabez. Why will you be always talking about money? If I did not know you so well, I should

think you were a miser, and thought of nothing but your gold. Do you think I care about money? If I only had a crust I should be happy if you were with me."

She had blurted out her consent to his proposal almost unconsciously. Money was nothing to her, he was all.

"But, Margaret, I want to do right. I should not like to drag down your life."

"Drag down my life! You, Jabez? And so you have not spoken of this before because of money, as though I had not enough for us both, ten times over."

"But, Margaret, I could not bear to use your—"

"Not another word, Jabez. *Mine*, indeed! Never speak like that again. Look at me and tell me if anything I may have is not yours as well. Have I not been longing to give you money for your work, and you would not ask me for it? And why? Remember that from now my purse is yours."

"No, Margaret, no. At any rate, not until you are my own wife. I am anxious to begin spending your money, Margaret, will you let it be soon?"

"You wish it?"

"How can you ask, Margaret?"

"You insult me, Jabez," she said, with a bright smile. "I promised I would grant you what you asked before I knew what it was, and, however hard it may be, I will not retract my promise now."

"And your father and mother, will they be willing?"

"Not if we have to live far away from them."

"And we need not. Margaret, what have we done that we should be so happy?"

"I? Nothing. You have done everything Jabez, I am fearful every day lest this great joy should all prove a dream. It is more than ever I dared to think or hope for. You so grand, and tender, and true; you, whom everyone is speaking about as—"

"Stop, Margaret. Not another word, or I'll compel you to cease talking."

And as she would persist in this strain, Jabez fulfilled his threat by taking a liberty with her rosy lips, which I think was pleasant to him, for he repeated it many times in spite of all her protests, which, after all, were not vigorous; indeed, *I* am inclined to think the whole matter became mutual, for Margaret's eyes were very bright and her cheeks very rosy as she entered the house that night with her affianced husband by her side.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LIGHT OF GOD.

In spite of all Jabez could say to the contrary, the wedding did not take place till the following spring, at least three months later than this ardent young man desired. The day came at last, however, and the event of the wedding caused a great stir at Heathertown and Wardlevale. Every wedding in the neighbourhood has since been compared with that, if it has been in any way pretentious; and the unanimous verdict has always been, "It's nowt to Measther Easterbrook's." Nearly every man, woman and child in the vicinity had a holiday that day, and the roads were lined with well-dressed crowds, who wanted, as they said, "T'let Measther Easterbrook and Miss Margaret see as how fouks wished 'em every happiness."

The wedding took place at Wardlevale. A licence was secured for the new church there, and all agreed that no more fitting place could have been selected. To watch the people as they stood around the gates of Heathertown Grange on the wedding morning, and to listen to them as they shouted when they saw the carriage containing the bride, was certainly to experience something not soon to be forgotten. Men, women and boys ran after the carriages in hopes of being able to get into the church to see the ceremony, but they were disappointed. Long before the

wedding took place it was crowded to excess, and even the bridal party had a difficulty in getting in.

At length the ceremony was over, and Jabez lifted the veil from his wife's beautiful face and saluted her; then the excitement became intense. The people could hardly wait while they signed the necessary papers before they began to pelt them with rice, and to shower good wishes upon them; but above the noise and stir of the people within was heard the shouts of those outside.

"God bless 'em both," they said, "they were made for each other. I used to think she was stuck-up like, but after seein' her work among t' poor, and hearin' her sing o' Monday nights, no one can say that, and as for Measther Easterbrook, he's one o' t' grandest chaps i' Yorkshire."

When the bridal party was coming out of the vestry there was some confusion. They were told to stop, as some one had something to say, but no one present looked like making a speech.

Then Jack Brag, Ned Stickfield, and Bill Besowrick came up, and made them presents on behalf of the villagers of Wardledale and Heathertown. I am not going to try and reproduce the speeches they made, but I know they were true and honest, and ofttimes their words brought tears to the eyes of those who were unaccustomed to weep. The presents, too, were worthy expressions of true affection, and I know that Jabez and Margaret treasured them among their dearest possessions.

When they got outside, and when the crowd saw Jabez and Margaret together, it is said that their shouts could have been heard miles away, while as for rice, I am inclined to think that the grocers got rid of all their little stock, and that there was a famine in the neighbourhood for some time afterwards.

I know I have described this wedding very badly. I have not said a word as to what Margaret wore, or as to

who was the best man, and who were the bridesmaids, and all those other matters which are vitally connected with every respectable wedding. But then I am not accustomed to describe such scenes, and should not do it justice. This however, I know, Margaret looked wondrously beautiful as she stood by Jabez's side, and there was a great love expressed in her dark eyes, and in her rich-toned voice, as she repeated the words that made her his forever. Jabez, too, was as happy as man could well be, and I know that when he looked at the queenly creature by his side he thought there was no such woman in the world besides. I think Reginald acted as best man, and Violet, beautiful and happy, was there too, so I suppose she was one of the bridesmaids, and as Reginald was telling her shortly afterwards that in two months it would be their turn, I expect they did not feel like complaining. As to other little matters, I will say nothing. If you wish to see all about the dresses, the presents, &c., &c., you must get the Moortown paper for that week, and you'll find it all there, in far better style than I can tell it. I have noticed, however, in all the accounts of the weddings I have read, that they finish up in words something like this: "The happy couple left by the 1.50 train for ——, where they are to spend their honeymoon;" so for the sake of those who will not take the trouble to find the Moortown paper, I may say that Jabez and Margaret left that day for Cornwall, where, with the wide, glorious sea on the one hand, and the lovely scenery on the other, they spent a happy month, and returned to a beautiful villa that was situated not far from Mr. Ashton's house, where they were to reside. They had taken this house, first, in order that Jabez might be near his work, and, second, that they might be near their parents' house.

And now I have not much more to write; the loving labour of many months is nearly come to an end, and we shall have to bid good-bye, for the time, at any rate, to those

whose fortunes we have tried to follow. If I were to write more about them I should have to write in the present tense, and that, for many reasons, I should not care to do. Before I drop my pen, however, I will try and relate a few facts which should be related in order to give completeness to my story.

First in order comes Heathertown Church. Things here are not so prosperous as I could wish. Wrangling and strife exist about policy and creeds, which, together with ill-feeling which many of the members have towards each other, cause a state of things not to be envied. It is true Mr. Bowman sees that the set of creeds in which he believes, or pretends to believe, is preached in letter if not in spirit, and the Rev. John Beswrick, who was quite confident about setting things all right, tries by his ecclesiastical sing-song and clerical attire to attract the multitudes, but somehow the church membership is diminishing, the chapel is becoming emptier Sunday by Sunday. Jack Brag, Ned Stickfield, and others wanted Jabez to allow them to come and join his church; but to this the young minister would not consent, and as they are still trying to work among their old companions, and are, by God's help, rescuing some, there is hope yet left in many hearts that when the Rev. John leaves the neighbourhood, and a man comes among them who will try and bring his work to bear upon the present life and needs of the people, that prosperity will again be seen.

Mr. Bowman still preaches his old, worn-out sermons, and tells people about imputed righteousness, with a great deal of unction; but has little success. Even his best friends see that death-bed scenes and illogical statements cannot lead men and women to lead lovely lives. However, he is content. He preaches sound (?) doctrine, and, although people's lives do not appear to be improved by his ministry, he comforts himself with the thought that works are but filthy rags. He often tries to undermine Jabez's work by attacks

on his doctrine. He cannot say anything against his real work, because he knows nothing of such work, but he knows all about creeds, and can detect what he calls heterodoxy, in whatever guise it may be found. "Ah, my friends," he says, "how can his work prosper for any length of time? What does he preach? Life. What did he say only last Sunday? I was told this by one who heard him. He said this :—'You realise the power of the atonement, in so far as you realise the spirit of Christ's life and death in your life. Have Christ in your life and abide in Him, and then you will reproduce His life.' Isn't that Unitarianism, isn't it salvation by works? How we ought to think about the words we sing sometimes :—

> 'Cast your deadly doings down,
> Down at Jesus' feet.'

And again :—

> 'Doing is a deadly thing,
> Doing ends in death.'

"Ah, friends, you will yet see the true doctrine triumphant, while those who have been faithful to it will sit at Christ's right hand."

In spite of all "Brother" Bowman's protestations, however, the people feel very glad that he will shortly have to leave them, and are looking forward to a change of ministry with great eagerness.

Fred Warren is married. When he heard of Margaret's approaching marriage, he loaded his pistol in order to shoot himself; but while nerving himself to take his departure from this world, he concluded that it would be a painful death, and all for no purpose. So he proposed to Hetty Brooklyn, who accepted him, and keeps him well in order. He is a model husband, and is as happy as an old gipsy woman declared any of the pug dog breed could ever be.

Violet and Reginald, too, are married, and live at Heathertown Grange. Reginald has taken Mr. Ashton's business, and he and his wife are as happy as two true-hearted souls need be. Mr. Verner still keeps on his house in Liverpool, but he spends most of his time at Heathertown Grange and at the villa near by, where he is always welcomed by Margaret and Jabez.

Wardlevale is a far different place from what it was. It is no longer a scene of misery, and riot, and sin, but a place of comfort and peace. Most of its inhabitants are true and kind to each other, and are faithful to their God. The publicans who strenuously opposed Easterbrook's labours do comparatively little business now, for the people have greater attractions elsewhere. As the population increased, Jabez found that he would have to increase the premises in almost every direction, until the work became gigantic in its proportions. There is now in connection with his church, a library of two thousand volumes, most of which are in constant demand, and a paid librarian to attend to its working. There are also two large gymnasiums, so that both girls and boys, men and women are not without arrangements which are helpful to strength and vigour. Likewise, in connection with the church, there are large baths fitted up with all modern appliances. During the winter months soup kitchens are open for the poor and the destitute. Indeed, the workings of the church are so many and varied, and the platform of its operations so broad, that it has become the subject of much controversy.

A man came to Jabez one day and told him he thought he was overstepping the functions of a true Church. "'Tis not the place of the Church to provide amusements, or swimming baths," he said, "but to preach the Gospel."

"Yes," replied Jabez, "I have had many criticisms on my work, some favourable and some otherwise; but I find that if we are to do real work we must appeal to men as a whole,

and seek to touch and ennoble every phase of their lives. The Church, to be true, must touch the whole life of the people, and so we try to do that which we believe necessary. Christ did this, at least I think He did. He cared for the people's minds, their bodies, and their souls, and we should do the same. You say it is not the place of the Church to provide amusements. Whose place is it, then? I find that too often when the Church does not provide amusements, some, who care for nothing but themselves and their own gain, place amusements before them associated with degrading allurements, until what should be innocent and helpful recreation becomes a curse. No, no, we want to help the people in every phase of their lives, physical, social, mental, moral, spiritual; and I believe the time will come when the churches of England will see that this is necessary; and when this is done, truly done, we shall see public-houses closed and infidel societies collapse. As it is, the labours of the Church are far too much one-sided, and a vast amount of energy and power is lying dormant."

Whether Jabez was right or wrong in his arguments, it is certain that the work prospered at Wardlevale; every branch of their organisation was vigorously worked with great success, until it became a centre of power for good throughout the neighbourhood. On Sundays many hundreds flocked to hear the truth, while throughout the week a work was carried on which blessed in every way those who participated therein.

Margaret is a true helper to Jabez in his work. Realising as she does the fact that religion is a real thing, and that Christianity is love and duty, the two together fight successfully against the evils which are around them. Jabez says that he could do nothing without Margaret, while she declares that she is only a poor co-pastor, ill-fitted to do the work she tries to do.

And what about their faith, what about the false beliefs that

both are accused of holding, in spite of the noble work they are trying to do?

> "God moves in a mysterious way
> His wonders to perform,"

said Cowper many years ago, and as I think of the influence that each of these had upon the other, I am inclined to reiterate the statement. When they met years before he was narrow, bigoted, loving the truth in a way, and yet intolerant towards others who thought differently from himself, because he fancied he possessed it all. Yet withal he was true in heart, and loved his God. She, on the other hand, was sceptical, harsh, haughty, unloving, and as uncharitable in her way as he was in his, and yet these two were brought together and each began to affect the other's life. By her scepticism and her critical objections she had moved him from his self-satisfied orthodoxy, and led him to struggle for a wider, deeper faith. She had torn down the walls of his bigotry, and led him to seek and find the golden fields outside. True, it had caused him many anxious hours, many terrible doubts, and much stern fighting; but he felt strengthened and blessed through it all, and his religion became infinitely richer and grander than it was before. God was more loving and more near, while Christ and His work were a thousand times more real, and the hope of the world, through Him, infinitely brighter. Margaret's lack of faith and her attacks upon his religion made his faith larger and stronger, until Christianity meant far more than it had done. And what of the influence of his life upon her? It led her to God. His sublime confidence in God staggered her in her unbelief, and his noble life led her to thirst for that which alone can satisfy the soul, and then when the fulness of time came, God brought their lives together and the two became one.

Men who never struggled with doubt, or who rest upon the authority of creeds or churches, may call them unsound in

the faith; while those who demand an assent to creeds formulated by men, and want them to be the test of belief for all time, might not admit them into their councils and conferences; but those among whom they work look upon them as messengers from the great Father of us all.

And are they happy? Could you go into their home, as I have done, and see their daily life, could you hear them talk in the still evenings when their day's work has been done, could you see the look of love and joy that spreads over the face of Jabez as he sees how happy is the wife of his heart, you would not need to ask the question. True, they still have much anxiety in the work, and as we may imagine, it is not pleasant to them to hear themselves libelled as heretics, servants of the devil, and destroyers of the strongholds of faith; but beneath the pain caused by those who can see no truth in any creed or ism but their own, is a great joy, the joy of knowing that Christ is abiding in their hearts, and that they are trying to do His will.

Let me give a conversation they had when coming home from their church at Wardlevale one Sunday night, and with that I will close my story.

"What a splendid congregation we have had to-night, Jabez," said Margaret, soon after they had left.

"It was very fine indeed. I have had a dozen applications from men and women who desire to come and have some talk about their religious life. They have been bad characters, too, I hear. Truly God is blessing us. Do you know, that while you sung 'The Better Land' to-night, scores were weeping?"

"God is blessing us, Jabez; and yet while churches are empty, their ministers are denouncing you as an infidel."

"Not as much as they have done, Margaret. Things are better than they were, and the light of God is breaking."

"It is, indeed; and we, Jabez, are, I hope, God's instruments in helping the light to shine."

"Your figure is wrong, I think, wife. I think rather that we lead some to the light."

"Yes, that's it, husband."

They walked for a little while in silence, then Margaret spoke again.

"We are very happy, Jabez."

"Happy! I didn't think we ever could be so happy. Ay, Margaret, my queen, we are sweethearts still."

"Ay, and always will be, my Jabez, until we arrive home in the Better Land."

"And there, too, my wife."

"Yes, Jabez, there, too. God is so good. Oh, my husband, faith and love are more than words can tell. They give life here and life hereafter."

"True, Margaret, and, thank God, *nothing* is too good or too great for God to do. But here we are at home."

Then the two, side by side, with their hearts full of love for each other and for their God, entered the home that their Father in Heaven had given them.

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